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ABSTRACT

This Teaching Adult Learners Kit (TALKit) is an inservice "cafeteria" that offers many choices to the workshop planner/facilitator. The core of the kit is a series of structured workshop activities designed to help teachers build a teaching foundation--a working philosophy for adult education. Activities focus on three areas: the philosophy of teaching and learning, understanding adult learners, and effective teaching of adults. The workshop activities are all interactive, hands-on learning experiences. Introductory materials discuss the role of the facilitator and include a chart that describes each activity and areas of focus and annotated listing of videotape resources. Each of the 10 activities has some or all of these components: introduction, purpose, materials list, preparation, organization, time, numbers, followup, transparency masters, handouts, and supplementary materials. Activities are as follows: "drawing" conclusions about teaching adults; nothing personal, but...; speak out on learning; straight talk; TALK about adult learners; teachers make it work; thumbs up, thumbs down; when I teach I...; words of wisdom; and worth a thousand words. Followup options are included for teachers who want more information, a deeper experience, or resources to help them prepare a personal professional development plan. Appendixes include sample inservice programs and masters for producing a teacher journal. (YLB)

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ED 378 401

TALKit

Teaching Adult Learners Kit

Professional development activities for teachers of adult learners

Developed by

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VISION STATEMENT

**The New Mexico State Department of Education
believes the education of all students must become the
mission for all New Mexicans. We believe education
must challenge all students to reach their potential.**

Introduction

The Teaching Adult Learners Kit (TALKit), developed by the Adult Basic Education Professional Development Project at the University of New Mexico, is an in-service "cafeteria." It offers many choices to the workshop planner/facilitator.

The core of the kit is a series of structured workshop activities. Directions guide the facilitator through each activity step-by-step. Blackline masters for transparencies and handouts and other supplementary materials are included for each activity. TALKit also includes descriptions of videotape programs available through the ABE Resource Library which add variety to the in-service menu. Finally, follow-up options are included in TALKit for teachers who want more information, a deeper experience, or resources to help them prepare a personal professional development plan.

The workshop activities in TALKit are designed to help teachers build a teaching foundation: a "working" philosophy for adult education. Activities promote discussion and exploration of teacher beliefs and classroom practice. As the activities help teachers clarify their role as adult educators, they also help them discover important tenets of adult learning theory and effective teaching behaviors.

The workshop activities are all interactive, hands-on learning experiences. One important source of knowledge about adult learning is the people who work side by side with adult learners everyday: the teachers. In these activities, teachers reflect on their individual experiences, exchange experiences and ideas with colleagues, and build a personal perspective on adult learning based on their collective wisdom.

TALKit is an exciting approach to in-service for teachers of adults because it demonstrates adult learning theory in the workshop activities themselves. For instance, many teachers have only experienced two models of teaching: the lecture or teacher-in-front-of-the-class model and the individualized learning lab. In the workshop activities, teachers will experience a variety of learning situations including individual reflection and writing, small group work, group discussion, presentations to other learners, and peer learning. They'll have the opportunity to "try things on" and consider how they might use the various strategies in their own classrooms. And teachers will have the chance to see what it feels like to have their experiences recognized and valued, built into the learning process.

Their adventure is in your hands now--in TALKit. Read on and discover how you--the facilitator--can provide these learning opportunities for the teachers of adults in your program!

Role of the facilitator

As facilitator, you are the key to a successful in-service activity. But, you don't have to be a genius to do a good job. And you don't have to have all the answers. One of the nice things about TALKit is that the participants will provide most of the ideas!

So, what are your jobs as facilitator? First, you'll plan the in-service. Then you make sure you have the materials you need. You're also responsible for creating a good learning environment and setting the tone for the in-service. Once the in-service begins, you model adult learning theory, facilitate group discussion, and direct the workshop activities.

Let's look at each of these steps in more detail.

The facilitator role	How TALKit helps
Plan workshop curriculum: Determine the time available for the in-service and choose the activities you'll be using accordingly. Include several types of activities. Consult with colleagues before making choices. Be sure activities relate to participant learning needs.	Activities clearly indicate time needed. Each activity is built around several different types of learning situations. Charts in the appendix help in planning for variety. The additional resources available also provide variety. Activities were planned in response to the most important interest indicated by teachers and program directors: working with adult learners.
Do advance preparation: Being well organized adds to your credibility. Make sure you pre-read and understand each activity. Get all materials ready before the in-service. Order videos and any other resources you need from the ABE Resource Library at least 2 weeks in advance. Arrange for "assistants" to help with logistics. On the day of the in-service, double check on materials needed, equipment, extra pens, etc. Be ready for "Murphy's law" to go into effect!	Clear, step-by-step directions are given for each activity. Activities were "road-tested" as they were developed to ensure clarity. Masters for all the supplementary materials needed are included.
Create a good learning environment: Choose a comfortable setting. Be sure room arrangement will accomodate both small and large group work. Consider participants' "creature" needs; coffee and doughnuts gets things off to a good start.	You're on your own here!

The facilitator role	How TALKit helps
Set the tone: Give participants an opportunity to meet and get to know each other. Let them know where the restrooms and phones are before the in-service begins. Be sure they feel free to get up, get coffee, and so on during the in-service. Make sure that participants are actively and fully involved in the learning process. Establish a "mind-set" for learning prior to beginning the activity.	Specific activities are included which allow for introductions and conversation. All activities are interactive and participatory. Introductions, purpose statements and quotations are used to establish a "mind-set" for individual activities.
Model principles of adult learning: Encourage participation, show that you value each participant's contribution and experience, use a variety of approaches, and tie the content to the real-life needs of the participants.	These and other principles of adult learning are built into the TALKit activities.
Facilitate group discussion: The single most important role of the facilitator is processing the ideas of participants and integrating them. Listen, clarify, synthesize, and record.	Instructions on how to elicit contributions, ideas to anticipate, and classification strategies to use for recording contributions are included in the activities.
Direct and monitor activities: Provide continuity during movement between small and large group activities, coffee breaks, etc. Give clear instructions, ask for feedback, check in on small groups and refocus group direction.	Clear instructions are given to the facilitator and scripted for the facilitator to use with participants. Feedback and participants reaction is solicited in all activities.

As a teacher, you probably found many of the roles a facilitator plays very familiar. Your experience in the classroom has included planning curriculum, preparing materials, and facilitating a variety of instructional activities including group discussion. And TALKit has been designed to help make your job easier. The hardest part may be the doughnuts!

You're ready now to take that first step: planning the in-service curriculum. Several samples are included in the appendix to help you get started, so take some time to look them over. Read about each of the workshop activities in the following chart to see which ones appeal to you. Then you're on your way. Good luck!

TALKit Workshop activities

The activities in the TALKit focus on three areas: the philosophy of teaching and learning, understanding adult learners, and effective teaching of adults. The chart below describes each activity to help you make a selection for your in-service.

"Drawing" conclusions about teaching adults (1 hour)
An art activity and group discussion combine to allow practitioners to think creatively about themselves as teachers and to explore various metaphors for teaching through discussion with colleagues.

Nothing personal, but... (1:30-2)
Most teachers of adults become aware over time of the many barriers to learning that may exist for their students. In this activity, participants identify and discuss those barriers with special attention to appropriate teacher actions and behaviors.

Speak out on learning (2-2:30)
Small groups will discuss different statements about adult learning, present their feelings to the larger group and facilitate further discussion among colleagues.

Straight talk (30-45 minutes)
Assessment of student learning and learning activities is an important part of adult education. This activity provides an example of interactive evaluation that helps students and instructors get excellent feedback.

TALK about adult learners (2-3)
A discussion of the basic tenets of adult learning theory will occur in small groups and be reported back to the larger group. Participants will have the opportunity to consider these statements based on their experiences in the adult education classroom.

Teachers make it work (2:30-3)
Participants work from a list of seven adult learning principles to identify possible teacher behaviors that incorporate these principles into the adult education classroom.

Thumbs up, thumbs down (1:30-2:30)
The individual activity and group discussion format of the following activity is designed to get workshop participants talking about their own learning experiences. They will discuss both positive and negative learning experiences and their reactions to each to discover perspectives they share with other adult learners.

When I teach I.... (1:30-2)
Participants will generate, in writing, ideas about teaching from their personal experience in the classroom. They will then exchange these ideas through discussion with colleagues and classify their thoughts to clarify their role in the adult education classroom.

Words of wisdom (1:30-2:30)
Thinking about a past teaching situation or brainstorming about a situation being faced by a colleague allows participants to process their experiences and to pool collective wisdom. The opportunity to exchange ideas that have worked in the classroom is recognized by teachers as one of the most valuable sources of professional growth.

Worth a thousand words (1:30-2)
This activity provides teachers an opportunity to work with colleagues in small groups and reflect on the teaching-learning process. Photographs act as a stimulus to open discussion on ways of knowing. Teachers will be asked to share their teaching and learning experiences and to suggest ideas about the nature of learning.

Philosophy of teaching and learning	Understanding adult learners	Effective teaching of adults
●		●
	●	
●		
		●
●	●	●
	●	●
●	●	●
●		●
●		●
●	●	●

Videotape resources

(available from the ABE Resource Library at UNM)

Understanding adult learners:

At a loss for words

Narrated by Peter Jennings, this special on literacy issues was shown on national television a couple of years ago. The issues are still relevant and the background information is good. He explores a variety of contexts and ways in which illiteracy creates problems for both individuals and communities. Time: One hour

A chance to learn

A Project PLUS presentation highlights literacy programs in several communities: (1) a rural California community with several program approaches including a bilingual literacy program in English and Paiute, (2) various Philadelphia programs organized around the mayor's office including a group approach and a community based program, (3) the workplace literacy program sponsored by the United Auto Workers, (4) an ABE program in Los Angeles, and (5) a student organized model from rural Kentucky started by a group of women when they were laid off. Time: One hour.

The Adventures of a radical hillbilly: An interview with Myles Horton

Myles Horton was the director of Highlander Folk School which encourages social action through education. The school historically has been involved in the organizing of the labor unions and the civil rights movement. Community leaders in both movements were students at Highlander. Today the school continues its interest in community and environmental issues. Time: Two tapes available. One is the full two hour interview; one a half hour edited version.

Helping Adults Learn

This series of four 28 minute tapes designed to orient teachers to their roles as adult educators. The accompanying Instruction Guide helps workshop planners identify the key points and provides follow-up discussion questions.

"Who are your students?" deals with the strengths and weaknesses of adult students, their motivations, and the barriers to their return to the classroom.

"Communicating with your students" discusses various techniques needed to reach adult learners. Everything from the way a lesson is taught to the way a teacher speaks to students takes on new importance in the adult classroom.

"Counseling for adult learners" is designed to acquaint the teacher with problems the adult students may bring to the classroom and ways these can be handled. Personal problems, worries, and feelings can be serious blocks to learning unless the teacher knows how to counsel adult learners.

"Teaching adults to read: The language experience approach" demonstrates an approach which uses meaningful, nonthreatening reading material developed by the learner. It shows the steps to follow when using the language experience approach in individual and group settings and provides examples and recommendations for using this method.

Instructional strategies:

The New GED Tests
Doug Whitney, Director of GED Testing, provides background information on the test and highlights of the revisions for 1988-1998. The program clarifies the new emphasis on reasoning skills in the content area with a brief overview of each section of the test including one or two sample questions from each test. Accompanied by a viewers guide which includes a special trainers section for workshop planners. Time: approximately one half hour.

KET: Thinking skills and the new GED Test
The tape focuses on comparisons of recall questions from the former test and new questions testing higher level thinking skills. Includes good examples of questions at different levels and a panel of teachers responding to this information with suggestions for working with students. Time: One half hour.

KET: GED Essay Writing
Background on the 1988 revisions: the rationale for the changes, examples of the new types of questions and a discussion of the scoring procedures. Includes reactions from a panel of teachers to the new test and sample papers with suggestions for student assignments. Time: One half hour.

Introducing writing to GED/ABE students
A professional development package including facilitator handbook and accompanying videotape. The activities are interactive with a group of teachers from Santa Fe Community College modeling each task before the workshop participants are asked to do the task. Activities demonstrate teaching writing in a small group. Time: Full-day workshop.

Changing the Rules: Teaching math to adult learners
A video demonstrates four key ideas to improve adult basic math instruction including integrating concrete learning activities into classroom instruction and using real-life math problems that have relevance to adults' daily lives. Accompanying viewer's guide includes an outline of the ideas in the video, questions for reflection, and ways to use in the classroom. Time: varies

Teaching adults with learning disabilities
This package includes two videotapes and an instructional manual. There are instructions for workshop leaders and a set of blackline masters for making transparencies and handouts. The program consists of two parts: identifying the characteristics of adults with learning disabilities and instructional strategies for learning disabled adults. The workshop takes two full days or several half-day sessions.

Characteristics of adults with learning disabilities
Instructional strategies for adults with learning disabilities
A 353 developed videotape includes both topics and print instructional guides for each. Designed to familiarize viewers with the traits and behaviors typically found among adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities and suggest ways to accommodate or compensate for them.

Title: **"Drawing" conclusions about teaching adults**

Introduction: An art activity and group discussion combine to allow practitioners to think creatively about themselves as teachers and to explore various metaphors for teaching through discussion with colleagues.

Purpose: To help participants explore their perceptions of their teaching style and discuss various styles relative to adult learners.

Materials:
(1) Overhead projector
(2) TALK transparency:
"Drawing" conclusions about teaching adults
(3) Drawing pens, pencils, crayons, and so on
(4) Teacher journals or large sheets of butcher paper

Preparation: Read entire exercise and background comments by author at the end of the activity.

Organization:

Step 1: Distribute pens, pencils, crayons, and decide whether group wants to use journals for drawing pictures or butcher paper for bigger pictures.

Step 2: Give directions to begin the activity. *"On a sheet of paper or in your journal, draw a picture of yourself working as a teacher. It need not be a fancy artistic creation. Stick figures are fine."* Allow 10-15 minutes for drawing.

Step 3: Display overhead, "Drawing" conclusions about teaching adults, and discuss metaphors with the group. *"In other groups of teachers who have done this activity, the pictures often fall into categories described as 'teacher metaphors.' Where do you fit?"* Go over metaphors with group and discuss each as a description of the teaching role especially when working with adult learners. (See author comments at the end of this activity sheet to help you facilitate discussion. (20-30)

Step 4: Say "*Look again at the picture of yourself as teacher. Does it fit within these categories? If not, how is it different? If it does fit, are you comfortable with your metaphor(s) or do you want to make some changes?* Ask teachers to discuss their reactions with a partner or to write comments in their journal. Go into a break as discussion/writing finishes. (5-15)

Time: 45 minutes-one hour

Numbers: Not limited

Follow-up: Movies with thought questions
Suggested activities for journal writing
Article reprint list: (originals to copy in TALKit)
Self-video activity with checklist
ABLE Sampler: Annotated booklist (see TALKit)
UNM Resource library list: checkout by mail

Author comments: (from <u>Mastering the teaching of adults</u> by Jerold Apps)

Problems are associated with some of these metaphors. For example, the gardener metaphor or some version of it has long been a standard in teaching. Give people the resources and information they need, provide a congenial environment, and learning will proceed nicely. That's true for some, but not for all. Some people benefit greatly when the teacher challenges them by raising questions and inquiring about the assumptions of what they are learning. Learners in challenging situations often emerge as "empowered learners," who can go out on their own and continue to think critically.

Most adults will not put up with the muscle builder approach. People want practical learning that is either immediately useful, soon will be, or has some direct value to them. Learning in and of itself simply does not appeal to many adults.

Unfortunately, the bucket fillers are quite prevalent. The assumption of this teaching approach is: The more information you have, the better educated you will be. Many people these days, myself included, believe that excessive information is itself a problem for many people. By providing increasing quantities of information we may be contributing to the learner's problem rather than helping solve problems.

The factory supervisor metaphor has gained considerable credence during the last decade or so. To be more competitive, businesses have streamlined their production and marketing and expedited their research and development activities. It seems logical that these firms would apply principles of efficiency and expediency to teaching their employees. However, many firms today are looking for workers who not only have the necessary job skills but also know how to think creatively and critically.

In my judgment master teachers are challengers, travel guides, gardeners, craftspeople or some combination of these.

"Drawing" conclusions about teaching adults

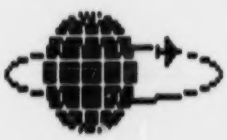
Lamplighters. **They attempt to illuminate the minds of their learners.**

Gardeners. **Their goal is to cultivate the mind by nourishing, enhancing the climate, removing the weeds and other impediments, and then standing back and allowing growth to occur.**

Muscle builders. **They exercise and strengthen flabby minds so learners can face the heavyweight learning tasks of the future.**

Bucket fillers. **They pour information into empty containers with the assumption that a filled bucket is a good bucket. In other words, a head filled with information makes an educated person.**

Challengers. **They question learners' assumptions, helping them see subject matter in fresh ways and develop critical thinking skills.**



Travel guides. **They assist people along the path of learning.**

Factory supervisors. **They supervise the learning process, making certain that sufficient inputs are present and that the outputs are consistent with the inputs.**

Artists. **For them teaching has no prescriptions and the ends are not clear at the beginning of the process. The entire activity is an aesthetic experience.**

Applied scientists. **They apply research findings to teaching problems and see scientific research as the basis for teaching.**

Craftspeople. **They use various teaching skills and are able to analyze teaching situations, apply scientific findings when applicable, and incorporate an artistic dimension into teaching.**

Title: **Nothing personal, but...**

Introduction: Most teachers of adults become aware over time of the many barriers to learning that may exist for their students. In this activity, participants identify and discuss those barriers with special attention to appropriate teacher actions and behaviors.

Purpose: To engage participants in a discussion of the barriers to learning that exist for adult students and to define and delimit teacher responsibilities relative to these barriers. Particular teacher behavior concerns relate to (1) knowing when and how to make effective referrals, (2) identifying responses appropriate to the teacher role, and (3) developing an understanding that students drop out for many reasons not the "fault" of the teacher.

Materials:
(1) Overhead projector
(2) TALK transparency: Nothing personal, but...
(3) Problem pool cards
(4) List of referral agencies from your community

Preparation: Read over entire exercise. Use list at end of this activity to prepare "problem pool" cards.

Organization:

Step 1: Arrange chairs in a large circle. On the floor in the middle, spread out the "problem pool" cards.

Step 2: Introduce the activity: *"As we work with adult learners, we very quickly find out that they are dealing with many potential barriers. One of our biggest challenges is to balance a concern for our students and an understanding of appropriate teacher behavior. We're going to spend some time identifying and discussing some of the barriers to learning that adult learners may experience and consider when and how we can be most helpful. To begin, each of you needs to 'dive in' to the 'problem pool' and find one problem that your students frequently have to deal with or that's really been on your mind. We'll take five minutes for this."*

Step 3: Go around the circle and have participants introduce themselves, their work situation, and briefly tell their reasons for choosing the problem they picked from the "problem pool." Be sensitive to time here. Limit each speaker to a minute or so and keep their comments focused. (20-30)

Step 4: Display overhead, Nothing personal, but..., and go back around the circle, quickly categorizing and recording problems in the three columns: personal, situational, and institutional. Then ask the group to brainstorm other barriers to adult learners and place in categories. (30-45)

Step 5: As a group, look at each column and identify which barriers could be affected by teacher behavior or institutional policy as compared to barriers which are outside teacher control or responsibility. Mark those that are appropriate for teacher involvement with an asterisk (*) and discuss what kinds of action or involvement would be appropriate and effective. (Again, pay special attention in the discussion to helping teachers understand the difference between barriers they can address themselves and those that call for referrals. Teachers also need to know that there are many valid reasons students are unable to continue in classes that don't reflect on the teachers or the instruction.) (30-45)

Step 6: Distribute your list of community agencies for teacher referrals and go over any information they may need. (5-10)

Creating "problem pool" cards:

Use half sheets of colored construction paper or tagboard trimmed into various shapes. List one of the following topics on each card and add any others you think of. You may also repeat a topic on several cards. For 30 participants you probably need about 60 cards, so they can have plenty to choose from. Topics: **Situational:** Childcare, transportation problems, changing work schedule, family responsibilities, physical abuse, have to get a job, home environment, no support network, spouse doesn't want wife or husband to go back to school, time constraints, forced to go to school. **Personal:** Substance abuse, fear of failure, fear of success, learning disabilities, physical illness, low self-esteem, test anxiety, lack of goals, poor problem-solving skills, personal motivation, fear of unknown, poor study habits, no school experience. **Institutional:** Lack of materials, intimidating environment, class locations, scheduling, handicap access, overcrowding.

Time: An hour and a half to two hours

Numbers: 20-30 participants

Follow-up: Movies with thought questions
Suggested activities for journal writing
Article reprint list: (originals to copy in TALKit)
Self-video activity with checklist
ABLE Sampler: Annotated booklist (see TALKit)
UNM Resource library list: checkout by mail

Nothing personal, but...

Situational	Personal	Institutional

TALK Transparency

Title: **Speak out on learning**

Introduction: Small groups will discuss different statements about adult learning, present their feelings to the larger group and facilitate further discussion among colleagues.

Purpose: To encourage participant examination of their values and beliefs about learning and to structure discussion of them as a group.

Materials:
(1) Overhead projector
(2) TALK Transparency: Speak out on learning
(3) TALK Handout: Speak out on learning
(4) TALK Activity sheet: Speak out on learning

Preparation: Read the entire exercise. Run off one copy of the activity sheet and cut it into 6 slips along the lines as shown. Each slip has one of the topics for group discussion printed on it.

Organization:

Step 1: Display the overhead, Speak out on learning, and give a brief introduction to participants. *"There are many different definitions or perspectives on adult learning. Some of those suggested by Jerold Apps in his recent book, Mastering the teaching of adults, are listed on this overhead. (Read list.) I would bet that as I read the list you had some reaction to several of the statements about adult learning. Today we will have the opportunity to consider these statements in small groups as a way of focusing on our perspectives about adult education. Let's form into small groups now."* (5-10 minutes)

Step 2: Form into small groups. The size of the groups will vary depending on the total number of participants. You should have six (6) small groups. (5)

Step 3: Distribute the teacher handout, Speak out on learning, and go over the directions with participants. (5-10)

Step 4: Pass out one of the slips you have prepared from the TALK activity sheet to each group. Now they have their topic and directions. The group should be ready to begin work. (5)

Step 5: Circulate around the room and give help as needed. Allow 30-40 minutes for group work. Each group will probably do some talking about several of the topics on the overhead. Five or ten minutes is built-in for "extra" discussion, but you may need to help some groups get on task! (30-40)

Step 6: Have each small group report to the whole group about their discussion and field additional comments from the larger group. Allow 5 minutes for each group to present and 5 minutes for the larger group to respond and comment. (60)

Step 7: Ask for any final comments from the group before you conclude the session.

Time: Two to two and a half hours

Numbers: No more than 30 participants

Follow-up: Movies with thought questions
Suggested activities for journal writing
Article reprint list: (originals to copy in TALKit)
Self-video activity with checklist
ABLE Sampler: Annotated booklist (see TALKit)
UNM Resource library list: checkout by mail

sPEAK Out on Learning

Adult learning is:

- Accumulation of information
- Change of behavior
- Improved performance or proficiency
- Change in knowledge, attitudes, and skills
- A new sense of meaning
- Personal transformation

TALK Transparency

Speak out on learning

Your group will have 30-40 minutes to discuss your topic and prepare to present your ideas to the others. The following guidelines may help you get started, but your presentation may be structured in any way you choose. You will have five minutes to present your ideas.

- **What does this statement about adult learning mean to you? Expand it to a more descriptive definition.**

- **How is this an accurate statement about adult learning? Give examples that show the importance of this perspective on adult learning based on your teaching experience.**

- **What is missing from this statement? List some elements that would make this a more complete definition of adult learning.**

SPEAK OUT ON LEARNING

Accumulation of information	**Change of behavior**
Improved performance or proficiency	**Change in knowledge, attitudes, and skills**
A new sense of meaning	**Personal transformation**

TALK Activity Sheet

Title: **TALK about adult learners**

Introduction: A discussion of the basic tenets of adult learning theory will occur in small groups and be reported back to the larger group. Participants will have the opportunity to consider these statements based on their experiences in the adult education classroom.

Purpose: To introduce participants to adult learning theory and facilitate critical reflection in this area.

Materials:
(1) Overhead projector and pens
(2) TALK transparency:
TALK about adult learners
TALK Back 1-6
(3) Teacher journals

Preparation: Read the entire exercise and prepare your own comments on all six statements.

Organization:

Step 1: Display overhead, TALK about adult learners, and go over the directions for the activity. *"On the overhead are some statements that focus on issues important to adult learning theory: learner experience, motivation, independence, and interests. These statements are phrased in a way to promote debate. We'll look at the statements from both a pro and a con perspective and for questions, comments or related issues that need to be considered with each statement. We will be working in small groups first, so let's form into groups of three or four."* (5-10 minutes)

Step 2: When groups have been formed, give additional directions: *"In each group choose just three of the statements to discuss. You'll have half an hour or so to exchange ideas. As you talk, record your ideas, so you can report back to the whole group later. Are there any questions about your task?...Let's begin."* Monitor groups and help as needed. See that all tenets are being covered in some group. If one hasn't been chosen by any group, ask a couple of groups to try it. (45-60)

Step 3: Take a five minute stretch break and then pull back together to the larger group. Display overhead, TALK Back 1, and ask for comments from the groups which considered this tenet. After all the groups that looked at tenet #1 have reported back, open the floor to any additional ideas that have occurred during discussion. Continue this same pattern with overheads 2-6. (60-90)

Step 4: At the end of discussion, ask the group to rephrase each tenet, not as statements for debate but as statements about adult learning that reflect the overall feelings of the group. This can be done in the small groups again, in pairs, or in their individual journals. (15)

Time: Two to three hours

Numbers: Not limited

Follow-up: Movies with thought questions
Suggested activities for journal writing
Article reprint list: (originals to copy in TALKit)
Self-video activity with checklist
ABLE Sampler: Annotated booklist (see TALKit)
UNM Resource library list: checkout by mail

TALK Back 1

In nearly every way, teaching adults differs from teaching children.

I agree because...	I disagree because...	I think it's interesting that...

TALK Transparency

TALK Back 2

Adults' life experiences make teaching adults easier.

I agree because...	I disagree because...	I think it's interesting that...

TALK Back 3

Adult readiness to learn is triggered by a "need-to-know" situation.
We should teach them what they want to know.

I agree because...	I disagree because...	I think it's interesting that...

TALK Transparency

TALK Back 4

Most adult students are independent, self-directed learners.

I agree because...	I disagree because...	I think it's interesting that...

TALK Back 5

Interactive teaching strategies are more effective for adult learners than independent study.

I agree because...	I disagree because...	I think it's interesting that...

TALK Transparency

TALK Back 6

The adult learning curriculum should be based on social action and community development rather than on individual problems and needs.

I agree because...	I disagree because...	I think it's interesting that...

TALK Transparency

TALK about adult learners

1. In nearly every way, teaching adults differs from teaching children.
2. Adults' life experiences make teaching adults easier.
3. Adult readiness to learn is triggered by a "need-to-know" situation. We should teach them what they want to know.
4. Most adult students are independent, self-directed learners.
5. Interactive teaching strategies are more effective for adult learners than independent study.
6. The adult learning curriculum should be based on social action and community development rather than on individual problems and needs.

I agree because...	I disagree because...	I think it's interesting that...

TALK Transparency

Title: **Teachers make it work**

Introduction: Participants work from a list of seven adult learning principles to identify possible teacher behaviors that incorporate these principles into the adult education classroom.

Purpose: To introduce participants to principles that research indicates improve learning in ABE and ESL classes and facilitate the identification of classroom practice that reflects these principles.

Materials:
(1) Overhead projector
(2) TALK transparencies:
Teachers make it work
Teacher Do's 1-7
(1) TALK handout: Teachers make it work

Preparation: Read over entire exercise. Prepare teacher handouts and overhead transparencies.

Organization:

Step 1: Distribute the TALK handout, Teachers make it work, and display the accompanying TALK transparency as you introduce the activity. *"This title says it all! Researchers in adult education tell us that the teacher is critical in establishing a classroom environment that encourages learning. They also tell us something about what those classrooms are like. Studies of students in Adult Basic Education and ESL classes have indicated that students learn more when they are in a classroom in which the teacher practices the learning principles listed on your handout and the overhead. Let's go over those principles briefly to make sure they are clear to each of us."* (5-10 minutes)

Step 2: *"Now let's think of specific actions teachers can take to incorporate these principles into the learning environment. In each box, write down ways teachers can implement the principle listed."* (15-20)

Step 3: Form into seven small groups, so each group can focus on one of the principles. Number off the groups 1-7 to assign the principles and distribute the appropriate Teacher Do's 1-7 transparency and an eraseable felt pen to each group. (5-10)

Step 4: Members of each small group are responsible to pool their ideas on the principle their group has been assigned and report back to the larger group at the end of the work time. Give them the following directions:

(1) You have twenty minutes to prepare.
(2) Use the overhead and pen to record your ideas.
(3) Leave some blank space to record ideas the larger group may suggest after your presentation is completed.
(4) After you finish your preparation, please spend any extra time discussing other principles. (25)

Step 5: Take a break after the small groups have finished their task.

Step 6: One member of each small group will bring the overhead with their ideas to the front of the room and share those ideas with the whole group. During and/or after their presentation, ideas from the floor may be recorded, too. (90)

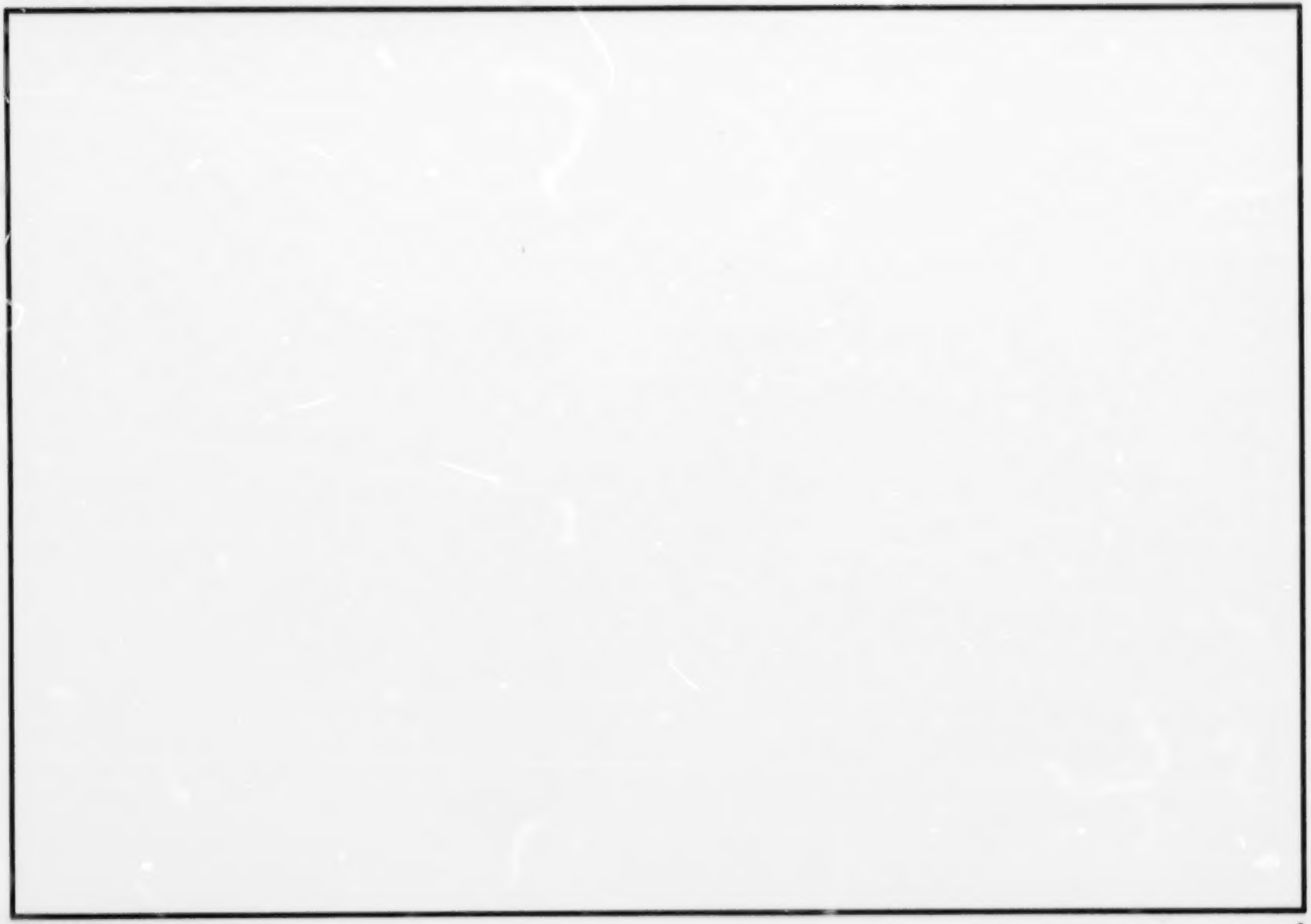
Step 7: After all ideas have been shared and recorded, ask each participant (or solicit volunteers) to tell one action they want to take in their classroom as a result of this discussion. Just a quick comment by each. (20-30)

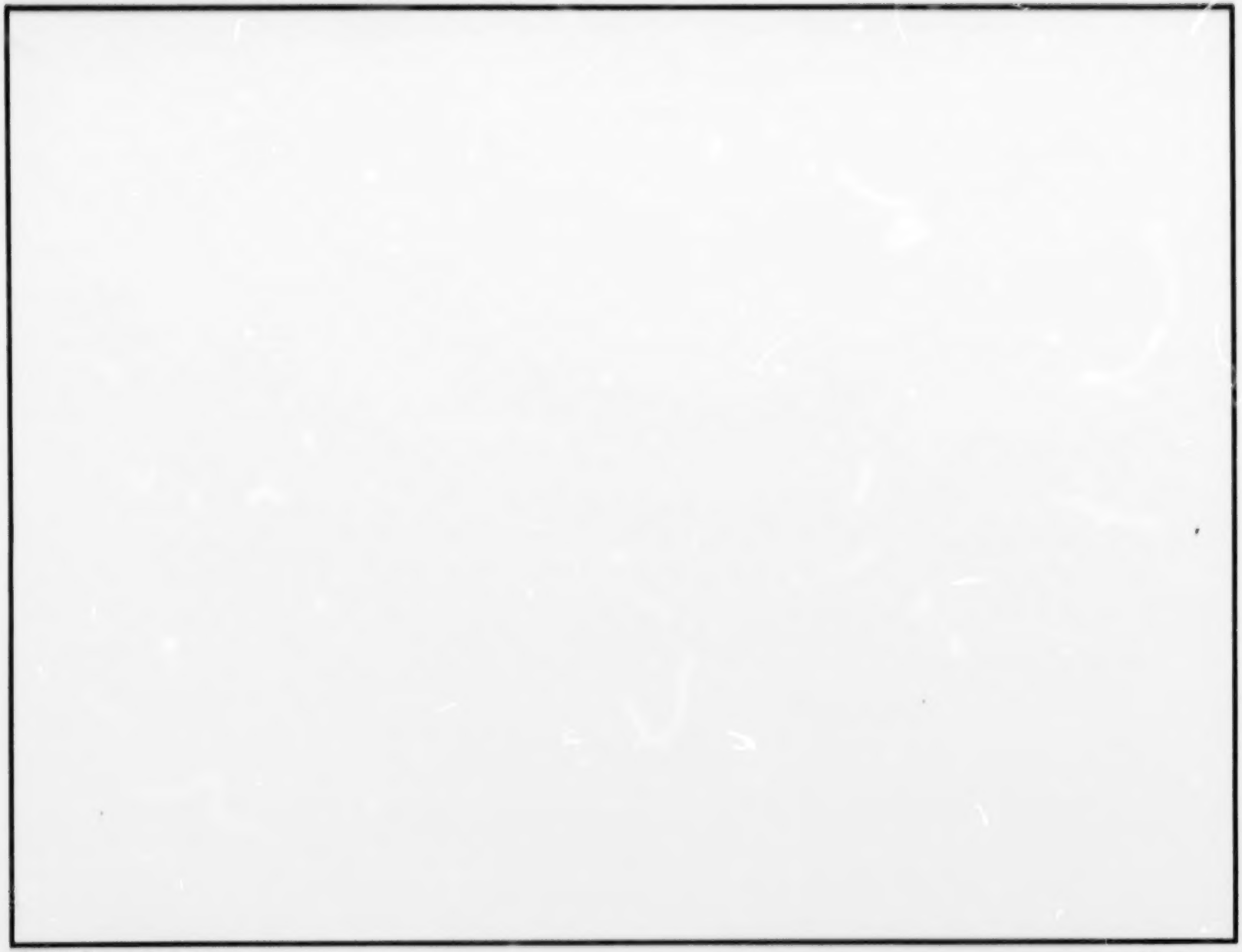
Time: Two and a half to three hours

Numbers: 20-35

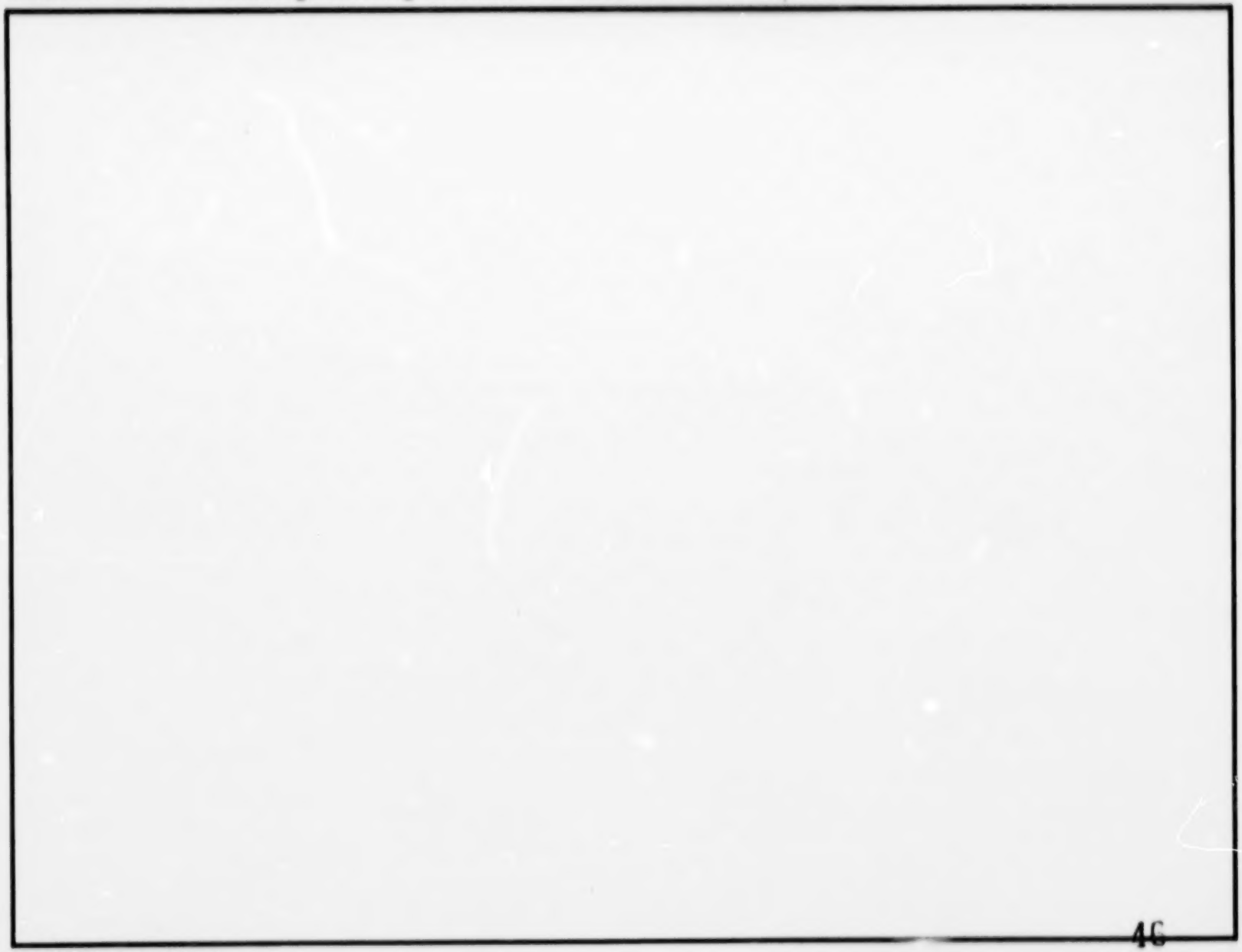
Follow-up: Movies with thought questions
Suggested activities for journal writing
Article reprint list: (originals to copy in TALKit)
Self-video activity with checklist
ABLE Sampler: Annotated booklist (see TALKit)
UNM Resource library list: checkout by mail

Teacher Do's 1: Establishing a learner-centered classroom

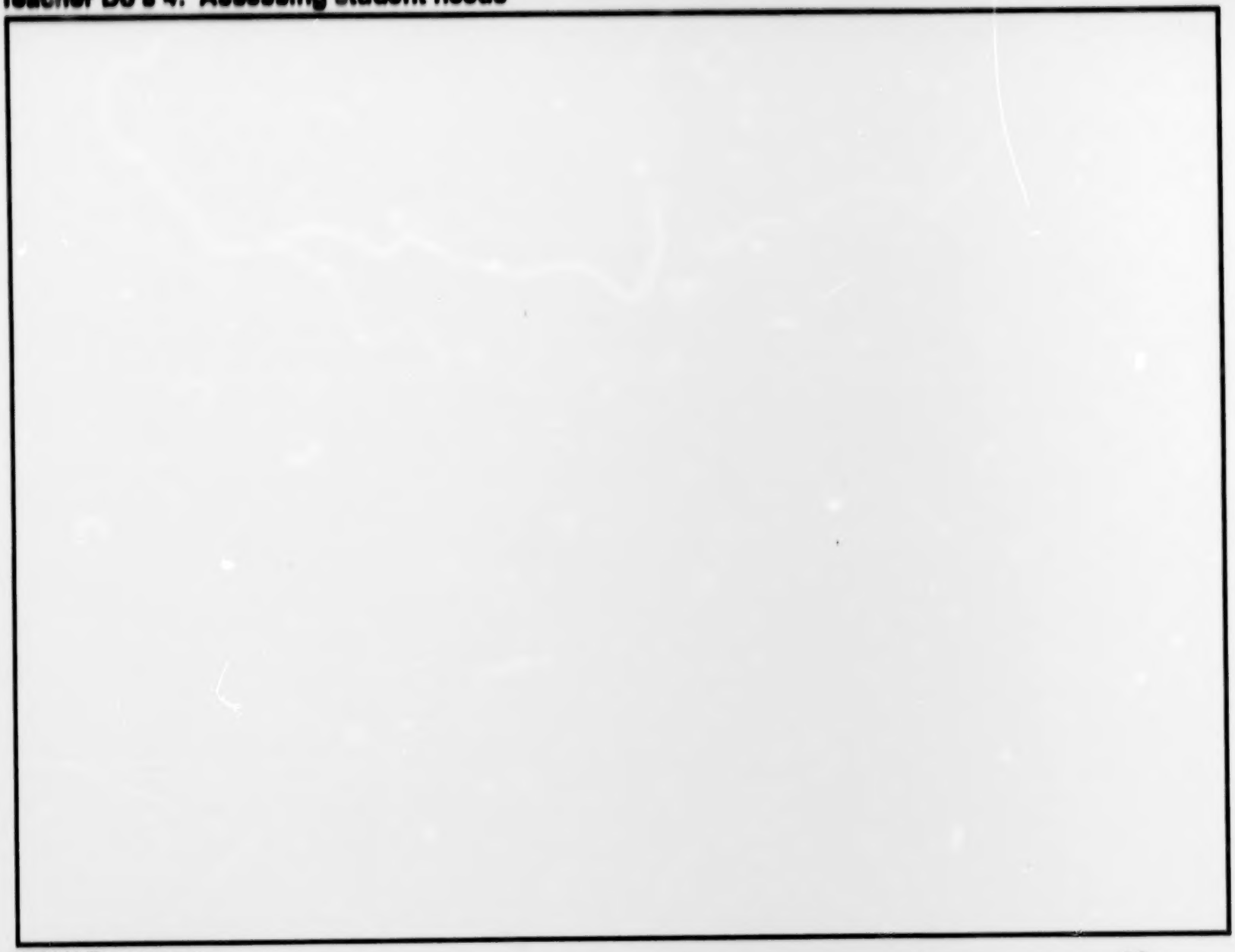




Teacher Do's 3: Relating learning activities to each learner's experiences



Teacher Do's 4: Assessing student needs



Teacher Do's 5: Building a friendly and informal climate

TALK Transparency

Teacher Do's 6: Participating in the learning process

TALK Transparency

Teacher Do's 7: Encouraging flexibility for personal growth and development

TALK Transparency

Implementing adult learning principles		
Learning principle	Adult behavior	Possible teacher action
1. Learner-centered	Wants the learner, not the teacher, to be the focus of learning activities	
2. Personalizing instruction	Seeks variety to meet own needs	
3. Relating to experience	Has numerous and rich experiences in life	
4. Assessing student needs	Desires identification and justification of own learning needs	
5. Climate building	Wants security to interact and experiment	
6. Participation in learning process	Seeks self-direction in curriculum decisions	
7. Flexibility for personal development	Moves toward being a fully functioning person	

Teachers make it work

Establishing a learner-centered classroom: Accomplished by allowing the students to initiate actions and take responsibility for their own learning. Students are encouraged to develop their own ideas and values, are involved in setting their educational goals, and are evaluated informally. Since many individual differences exist, a variety of teaching methods and materials are used by the teacher who functions as a facilitator rather than as a reservoir of knowledge.

Personalizing instruction: To meet the unique needs of students, educational objectives are based on individual motives and abilities. Various materials and methods are used, and instruction is often self-paced. The teacher does much informal counseling and encourages cooperation rather than competition.

Relating learning activities to each learner's experiences: To make learning relevant, activities are organized to take into account the student's prior life experiences and the problems that they encounter in everyday living. Students are encouraged to ask basic questions about their society and about their role in it.

Assessing student needs: Treating a student as an adult means finding out what each student wants and needs to know. This information can be gathered by individual conferences and informal counseling.

Building a friendly and informal climate: A warm and supportive classroom environment encourages student dialogue and interaction. Errors are accepted as a natural part of the learning process with failure serving as feedback for future positive actions. Students have the freedom to explore elements related to their self-concept, to practice problem-solving skills, and to develop interpersonal skills.

Participating in the learning process: Students can be involved in determining the nature of their own learning and in deciding the exact criteria that will be used to judge if adequate learning has occurred. Involvement in identifying the problems to be studied and in the evaluation process fosters an adult-to-adult relationship between the teacher and student in which both are active participants.

Encouraging flexibility for personal growth and development. Because personal fulfillment is a central aim of education, flexibility is maintained by adjusting the classroom environment and curricular content to meet the changing needs of the students. Issues that relate to value judgements are addressed in free, open discussion to stimulate understanding and future personal growth.

Title: **Thumbs up, Thumbs down**

Introduction: The individual activity and group discussion format of the following activity is designed to get workshop participants talking about their own learning experiences. They will discuss both positive and negative learning experiences and their reactions to each to discover perspectives they share with other adult learners.

Purpose: To help participants identify characteristics that make learning enjoyable and of value to them, view themselves as adult learners, and discuss their perceptions and experiences with other educators.

Materials:
(1) Overhead projector and pens
(2) TALK transparency: Thumbs up: thumbs down
(3) TALK Handout: Thumbs up, thumbs down
(4) Additional overhead and a blank transparency or flipchart and felt pens (See Step 4)
(5) Teacher journals

Preparation: Read over entire exercise.

Organization:

Step 1: Give a brief introduction: *"In looking for an understanding of adult learners, we can find answers from our own experiences as adult learners. The activity today will allow us to consider the learning situation from that perspective. We'll discuss both positive and negative learning experiences we've had and consider the implications of both in teaching adult learners. So, after we have had time to work independently, we'll regroup and discuss what these experiences mean to us as teachers in the adult education classroom."* (2 minutes)

Step 2 Distribute handout, Thumbs up: thumbs down, and go over directions with participants. Allow 15 minutes for writing. (20)

Step 3: Display the overhead, Thumbs up, thumbs down, and ask individuals to share either a positive or negative experience and describe the characteristics that made the experience either good or bad. As you list them on the overhead, watch for duplicates or similar comments. Just add a tally mark out front each time to show it was repeated: (III: "not enough time," for example). (20-30)

Step 4: Review total list of "ups and downs" with the group. Ask them to suggest what any one of these characteristics tells us about teaching adult learners. List their responses on a blank transparency and a second overhead. (This is the tricky technical part. You need to keep the original overhead, Thumbs up; thumbs down, on display to work from. You will either need a second overhead projector with a blank transparency to write on or a flipchart to write on while the original overhead is still on display. Got it?) (20-30)

Step 5: *"Now that we've got a clear picture of a good learning experience for adult learners, let's look at what this says about the effective teaching of adults. What does this mean for the class you will teach tonight?" How can we take what we've discovered here and apply it for 'thumbs up' teaching?"* (30-60)

Step 6: Ask individuals to make notes in their journal about any new or interesting ideas that came up in the discussion. As they finish writing the group can go into a break.

Time: An hour and a half to two and a half hours

Numbers: Not limited

Follow-up: Movies with thought questions
Suggested activities for journal writing
Article reprint list: (originals to copy in TALKit)
Self-video activity with checklist
ABLE Sampler: Annotated booklist (see TALKit)
UNM Resource library list: checkout by mail

Thumbs up!

Thumbs down!

Thumbs Up!

Think of a recent learning experience you've had that you found valuable and enjoyable. List the characteristics that made this a good learning activity for you.

Thumbs Down!

You can probably also think of a learning experience or class that was just awful! Describe the characteristics that made this a bad learning experience for you.

After we have had time to work independently, we will report back to the group and discuss what our experiences mean to us as classroom teachers.

Title: **When I teach I...**

Introduction: Participants will generate, in writing, ideas about teaching from their personal experience in the classroom. They will then exchange these ideas through discussion with colleagues and classify their thoughts to clarify their role in the adult education classroom.

Purpose: To allow participants to focus on their teaching experiences in order to identify their personal approach to the learning process, share these experiences with peers, and consider the role of the teacher in adult learning.

Materials:
(1) Overhead projector and 8-10 transparency pens
(2) TALK transparency:
When I teach I... (with examples)
When I teach I... (blank copies for group recording)
(3) Teacher journals

Preparation: Read over the entire exercise. Prepare the blank When I teach I ... transparencies.

Organization:

Step 1: Display overhead, When I teach I..., and review directions: *"We're going to spend some time now thinking about teaching...on our own and then sharing our thoughts in small groups. In your journal, write the words 'When I teach I...' Then write whatever comes to mind to complete that sentence. Don't worry about complete sentences. Write words, ideas, or phrases like the examples already listed. Take 5 minutes to complete your list."* (10 minutes)

Step 2: Break teachers into small groups (3-4) to discuss their ideas. Ask the small groups to volunteer ideas they especially liked or had in common. Give each group a blank When I teach I... transparency and have them record their ideas on the overhead to share with the whole group. (30)

Step 3: Go over each group's overhead one at a time. As you read an item, put a "C" in front of an idea that relates to content and a "T" in front of an idea that relates to teacher behaviors. As you look at the final tally, discuss briefly what it suggests about the role of the teacher in the adult learning classroom. You may touch on the balance between content and affect in the classroom, the control the teacher has over various items listed, and how the items relate to effective adult learning. (30-40)

Step 4: Ask participants to choose one idea they would like to "do more of" in their classroom and list some ways they could use this idea in their journals. They could also talk about this with a partner after each individual has had some time to write. (10-20)

Time: An hour and a half to two hours

Numbers: Not limited

Follow-up: Movies with thought questions
Suggested activities for journal writing
Article reprint list: (originals to copy in TALKit)
Self-video activity with checklist
ABLE Sampler: Annotated booklist (see TALKit)
UNM Resource library list: checkout by mail

When I teach I...

T	**Have fun...**
C	**Provide information...**
C/T	**Use participants' examples...**

When I teach I...

Title: **Words of wisdom**

Introduction: Thinking about a past teaching situation or brainstorming about a situation being faced by a colleague allows participants to process their experiences and to pool collective wisdom. The opportunity to exchange ideas that have worked in the classroom is recognized by teachers as one of the most valuable sources of professional growth.

Purpose: To provide a forum for experienced instructors to reflect on teaching challenges they or their peers face in the adult education classroom and suggest effective teaching/counseling strategies for various situations.

Materials: (1) TALK transparency: Words of wisdom
(2) Index cards

Preparation: Read entire exercise and prepare a couple of "words of wisdom" cards as examples to get things started.

Organization:

Step 1: Display overhead, Words of wisdom. Briefly discuss the quote and directions for the discussion. Using the examples you prepared beforehand of a teaching experience you'd do differently now and a question with a description about a current teaching situation, walk through the activity. Read your situation and ask for comments or "words of wisdom." There is no need to record ideas during this activity. Recording of ideas may be done informally by individuals as they hear things that they want to remember. (10-20 minutes)

Step 2: Distribute plenty of index cards to each table and let people begin writing. You may want to talk to a couple of experienced teachers before you begin the activity to encourage them to choose the second option: reporting on a past experience they've learned from. It is really helpful to novice teachers to realize that other, more experienced, teachers have had their bad moments, too. (20-30)

Step 3: Pass the "hat" (or a small box, coffee can, etc.) to gather index cards and begin discussion with one of the cards. To move discussion along, it may be a good idea to use a kitchen timer set for 3-5 minutes for each situation. The group can always vote to extend the discussion time if a hot topic comes up, but a timer is a good way to prevent rambling.

Be alert for duplicate situations and move on to the next card. You may want to have a helper pre-reading and selecting cards from the hat for you to open to the group. That way they can eliminate duplicates right away.

If you are able to have an extended discussion, be sure to have a short break in the middle of discussion. A good way to keep them interested through the break is to read a stimulating card right before you take the break and get them thinking about it, so they'll be wanting to come back to share their ideas. (45-90)

Step 4: You need to have a sense of when the group has had enough and move into small groups while they still have some energy left! In the small groups, participants will talk with peers about ideas they got from the discussion that they think will prove useful and how they might use them in their classroom Focus the discussion for them by asking, *"This has been really interesting, but before we run out of gas we need to take some time to think about how we can use what we've heard today in our classrooms. Let's break into groups of 3-4 and talk about that for a few minutes. The question is: What does this mean for the class you'll be teaching this week?"* (15-30)

Note: (If the activity goes well and there are more cards to be discussed when you run out of time...or gas, the group may want to keep them to continue the discussion at a future staff meeting or some other opportunity. If you meet with your staff regularly, or have potlucks , or whatever, you could use just **one** card and limit discussion to 10-15 minutes at the beginning or end of the get-together.

Time: An hour and a half to two hours or more depending on interest that develops in discussion.

Numbers: Not limited

Follow-up: Movies with thought questions
Suggested activities for journal writing
Article reprint list: (originals to copy in TALKit)
Self-video activity with checklist
ABLE Sampler: Annotated booklist (see TALKit)
UNM Resource library list: checkout by mail

Words of wisdom

"You can only learn from the experiences you learn from!"
Myles Horton
Highlander

We don't get the chance as often as we'd like to reflect on our experiences in the classroom...or to exchange ideas with our colleagues. But teachers know that getting ideas from other teachers is invaluable.

Today we are going to take the time to pool our collective wisdom on topics that are on your mind. You'll choose those topics by responding to the questions below on the index cards at your table. You will be able to submit them to the group anonymously by putting them in the "hat" as it comes around or you can keep your cards and share them with the group directly. Your choice!

Ask a question about a dilemma, problem, or situation you are now facing in your teaching. Give a brief description of the circumstances: student population, administrative expectations, resources available, and any other information that would be helpful to your colleagues as they respond to your question with their "words of wisdom."

and....or

Look back at a teaching experience or situation you'd like to be able to do differently. Write a little about it, telling how your philosophy, skills, or approach has changed. Are there any "words of wisdom" you can share with your colleagues to help them avoid that pitfall?

Title: **Worth a thousand words**

Introduction: This activity provides teachers an opportunity to work with colleagues in small groups and reflect on the teaching-learning process. Photographs act as a stimulus to open discussion on ways of knowing. Teachers will be asked to share their teaching and learning experiences and to suggest ideas about the nature of learning.

Purpose: To foster a wide-ranging discussion of the learning process that will suggest ideas important to the successful teaching of adults: different ways of knowing, the collaborative nature of learning, and the many methods and contexts of adult learning.

Materials:
(1) Overhead projector and pens
(2) Photo set
(3) Masking tape (or way to hang photos)
(4) TALK transparency: Ways Adults Learn

Preparation: Take some time to look at the photos and think about each one. Work through your own answers to the discussion questions listed, so you're ready to jumpstart the group if needed.

Organization:

Step 1: Divide participants into small groups of 3-5 members and give one photo to each group.

Step 2: Direct the groups to look at their photo and talk with each other about what they SEE happening in the picture and what they might INFER from the picture. Let them know that someone from each small group will be asked to report to the whole group at the end of a 5-10 minute period.

Step 3: Take one small group at a time. Display their photo in front of the whole group. Have each small group talk about the picture telling what they SAW and what they INFERRED. (20-30 minutes/3-5 per group)

Step 4: When all the photos are on display and all groups have reported, ask the whole group to tell how the pictures are alike and how they are different. Usually the group will eventually comment that the pictures all show learning going on. If they don't come up with this you can introduce the idea by asking, *"What is happening in these pictures that's important to us as teachers?"* (5)

Step 5: After the group has identified the photos as different learning situations, ask the following questions about several of the photos (one at a time). *"Who are the learners in this picture?...How are they learning?...Who are the teachers?...How are they teaching?"* (5-10)

Step 6: Now ask the group to look more closely at all the pictures, especially the adult "learners" in each picture. Then ask: *"What do these pictures say to you about how adults learn?* List their responses on the Ways Adults Learn transparency (in the first column). (10-15)

Possibilities:
*Adults learn from sharing information or experiences in a group.
*Adults learn by teaching, modeling, and demonstrating a skill.
*Adults learn in groups and individually
*Adults learn in formal and informal settings.
*Adults learn through reading, writing, speaking,listening, watching.
*Adults learn by doing, through experimentation.

Step 7: Ask individuals to tell about an instance in their life when they have been a "learner" and a "teacher" at the same time. *"What kinds of things were you thinking about as learners? As teachers? How are the perspectives similar? How are they different?"* Be prepared to share a personal example and comments to get the discussion going. (10-15)

Step 8: Go back to the ideas listed on the overhead and ask if there are any ideas they would like to add based on the discussion of their experiences as "teachers" and "learners." Then ask volunteers to choose one idea listed about ways adults learn that stands out to them and tell what it means to them in their teaching. *"What are the implications for us as teachers?" Give one specific example how you would use this in your next class session."* Label the second column on the transparency Implications for teaching and record their comments next to the idea on adult learning being discussed. Be open to comments from other teachers, too. (20-30)

Step 9: Congratulate the group on its good work and ask if there are any final comments on learning or teaching they would like to make.

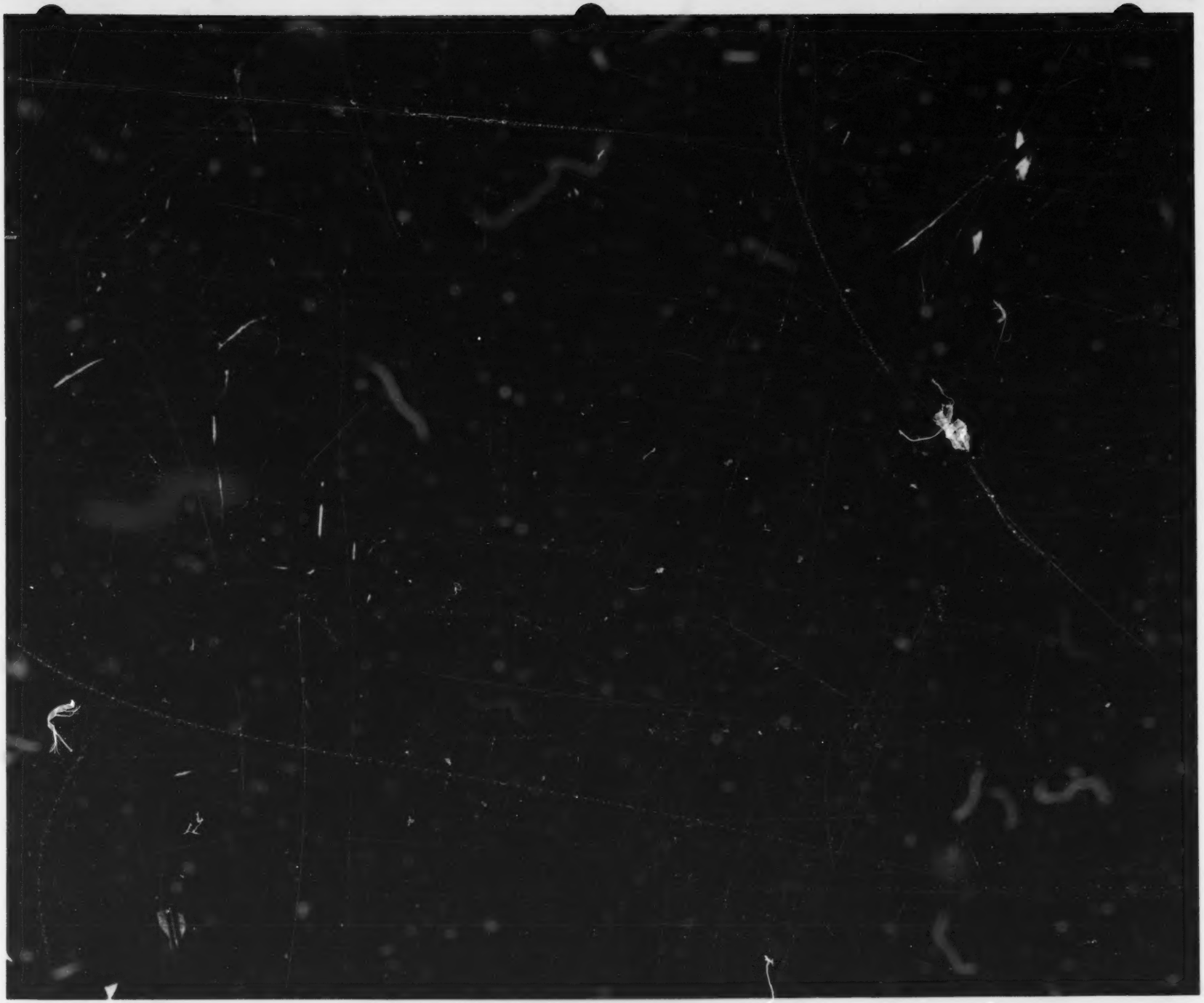
Step 10: Take a break. (Good job!)

Time: An hour and a half to two hours

Numbers: 30-40 participants or any smaller group

Follow-up: Movies with thought questions
Suggested activities for journal writing
Article reprint list: (originals to copy in TALKit)
Self-video activity with checklist
ABLE Sampler: Annotated booklist (see TALKit)
UNM Resource library list: checkout by mail

Ways adults learn



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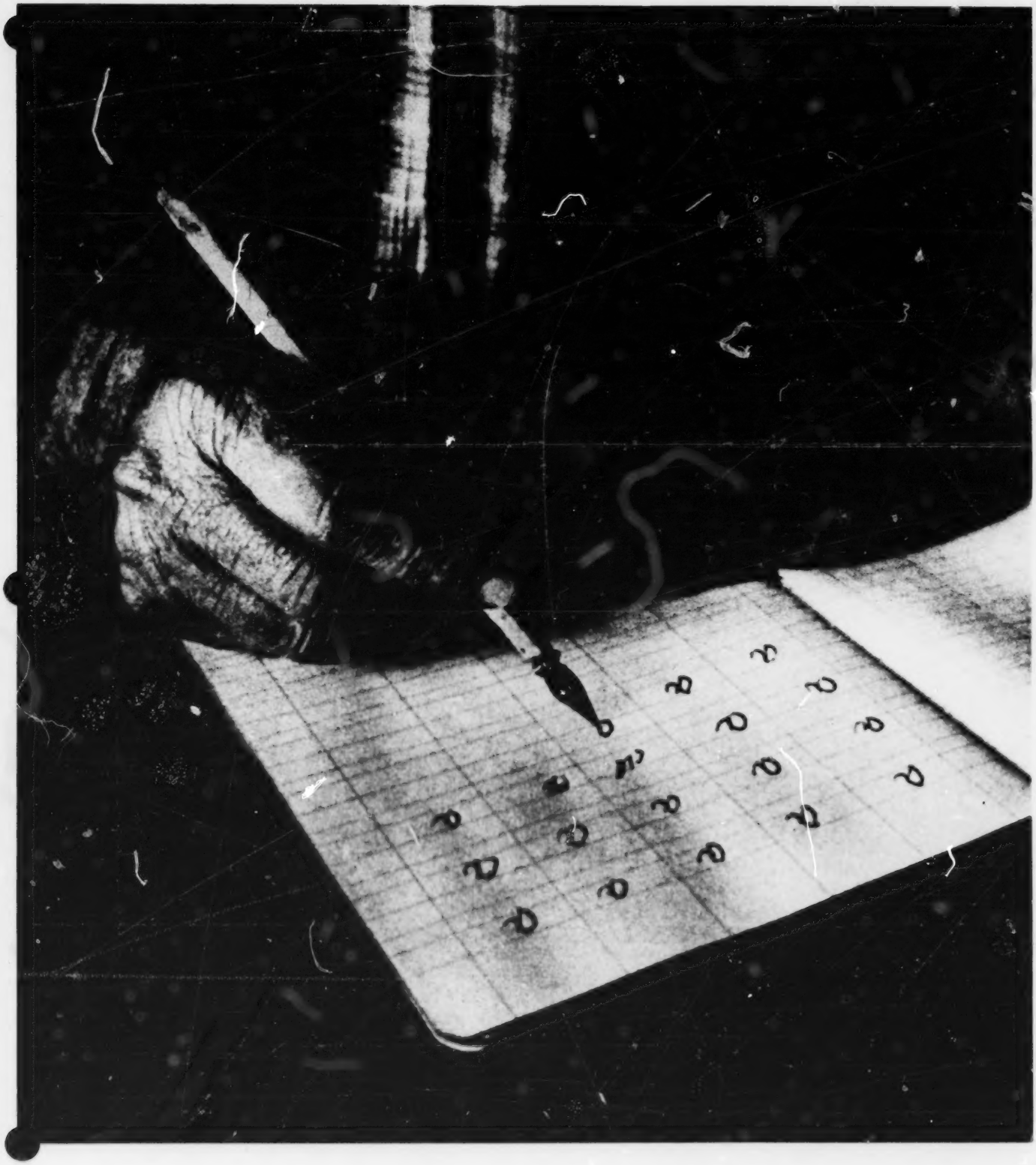

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On your own: Follow-up activities

Movies with thought questions

Choose one of the films below. You may enjoy the experience more if you invite one or two other ABE teachers to join you...maybe for a potluck while you watch and have a discussion later!

Dead Poets' Society:

1. What elements of "the Captain's" teaching philosophy could be seen in this film?
2. Which elements are appropriate for adult learners?
3. How does his teaching philosophy compare with yours?
4. Did he teach you anything about teaching?

Stand and deliver:

1. Identify the barriers to learning for the young adults in this story.
2. How do they compare to your students' situations?
3. Think about some of the "significant others" in these students' lives: parents, teachers, and peers. How did they create barriers to learning for the students? How did they open doors to learning?
4. What lessons are there in this film for your teaching?

Stanley and Iris:

1. How are these people like the adult learners in your classroom?
2. What barriers to learning did you see in these people's lives?
3. What strengths could these adults bring to the classroom?
4. What did you learn about teaching from this film?

Suggested activities for journal writing

Many years ago I began writing in a journal. I've found it an extremely powerful tool not only for helping me get in touch with my teaching, but also for confronting myself. I try to write something everyday. Some of the ways journal writing has helped me take charge of my teaching include the following:

To name and clarify my teaching. By writing about my teaching, including the details of relationships with learners, the frustrations with facilities, the challenges of working with ever-changing content, I am able to clarify my thoughts, feelings, and observations about my teaching. Journal writing allows me to explore the connection between my concrete experiences and the abstract thoughts I have about them and strengthen the power and precision of my thinking.

To discover unknowns about how I teach. I often become aware of new dimensions of my teaching. All of us know more about teaching than we are conscious of. Our body language, how we respond to questions, knowing when to switch to a new topic, approaches for encouraging the timid and dampening the over-aggressive--all are techniques we use subtly and sometimes without awareness. Writing can help us begin to uncover these unknown skills, although certain aspects of our teaching, I firmly believe, can never be put into words.

To define and solve problems. Sometimes problems emerge in our classes, and we are baffled about what to do. I remember so clearly the second session of a semester-long class of 35 participants. A tall, blond haired young man in his early thirties stood up, looked me in the eye, and asked, "When are you going to teach us something, I mean really teach something? I've had it with your questions and stories." I let it pass, thanking him for his contribution while trying hard not to sound defensive. That night, when I wrote in my journal, I talked about the class and what I had been doing and how the learners were reacting. And, of course, I talked about the young man who had rather belligerently confronted me. I wrote about alternative actions I might take. I could change my teaching approach. I could talk with him before class and try to explain what I was trying to do with my teaching. I could take time to try to explain to the entire class what I was doing and why. And then I decided to do nothing. I'll never really know if that was the right decision, but journal writing helped me crawl into the problem and look in all the corners, some of them dark and difficult to understand. At the next session, the young man seemed more settled and accepting, and I went on, following the same approach I had followed in earlier sessions.

To create new ideas. The process of journal writing often becomes a highly creative activity for me as new ideas, new connections, new ways of doing old things, old ways of doing new things, pop into my mind and I write them down. Thus, writing becomes not only a way to express creativity, but a trigger for creativity itself.

To clarify personal values. As I write and attempt to clarify my thoughts about teaching, I, of course, must make choices because I can't write about everything. Thus, in a very practical way, I am coming to grips with what is most important to me. I am, in effect, identifying *my* values.

To provide an historical record. I record the titles of books I have read, meetings I attended, names and addresses of people I have been in touch with, and a host of other "historical" information. My journal thus becomes an invaluable record in addition to the other ways journal writing has assisted me.

(From Mastering the teaching of adults by Jerold Apps)

ABE Resource Library

This is just a partial listing of books we thought would be especially interesting to teachers. Books are available through the ABE Resource Library at UNM. Please feel free to visit us at Mesa Vista Hall, Room 4018, or you may request books by mail. Call 277-5259 or 277-6453 to make a request or for additional information.

Accent on Learning (Cross)

Adult ESL Instruction: A Sourcebook (Guglielmino)

Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning (Cross)

Adult Learning: Research and Practice (Long)

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1. Adult Classroom Environment: The Role of the Instructor
2. Adult Literacy Issues: An Update
3. Adult Literacy Learner Assessment
4. Adults in Career Transition
5. Collaborative Learning in Adult Education
6. Ethical Practice in Adult Education
7. Guidelines for Working with Adult Learners
8. Locating and Selecting Information: A Guide for Adult Educators
9. Managing Your Professional Development: A Guide for Part-time Teachers of Adults
10. Reflective Practice in Adult Education
11. Strategies for Retaining Adult Students: The Educationally Disadvantaged
12. Teaching Adults: Is It Different?
13. Teaching Adults with Learning Disabilities

ARTICLE REPRINTS

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

PRACTICE APPLICATION BRIEF

by Susan Imel
1991

Adult Classroom Environment: The Role of the Instructor

Ever since Malcolm Knowles introduced the concept of "climate," adult educators have been talking about how to provide an appropriate environment for adult learning. Because it is widely believed that teaching adults is different from teaching children and adolescents, many prescriptions exist for structuring the adult learning environment to take into account these differences. Until recently, however, there has been little research to confirm or refute these suggestions. This **Practice Application Brief** examines some recent research that sheds light on the kind of classroom environment desired by adults and describes implications for practice emerging from the research. Because instructor behavior is a critical factor in shaping classroom climate (Knowles 1980), the focus is on the instructor's role in establishing an appropriate adult learning environment.

What Does the Research Say?

Research conducted by Darkenwald and by James and Day provides information about the effect of the instructor on classroom environment. Darkenwald's research is concerned with measuring the social environment of the adult classroom, whereas James and Day focus on how instructor characteristics contribute to demands felt by students. Although unrelated, these research studies both support the contention that the instructor's role is critical in establishing an adult classroom environment.

Assessing Adult Classroom Environment

In order to assess classroom social environment, Darkenwald (1987, 1989) and his doctoral students developed the Adult Classroom Environment Scale (ACES). Based on Moos's Classroom Environment Scale, the ACES envisions the adult learning environment as a system that includes the following elements: teacher behavior, teacher-student interaction, and student-student interaction. The ACES measures seven empirically based dimensions (Darkenwald 1989, p. 72):

Involvement. Extent to which students are satisfied with class and participate actively and attentively in activities (e.g., most students take part in class discussions).

Affliation. Extent to which students like and interact positively with each other (e.g., students in class work well together).

Teacher Support. Extent of help, encouragement, concern, and friendship that teacher directs toward students (e.g., teacher encourages students to do their best).

Task Orientation. Extent to which students and teacher maintain focus on task and value achievement (e.g., teacher seldom talks about things not related to the course).

Personal Goal Attainment. Extent to which teacher is flexible, providing opportunities for students to pursue their individual interests (e.g., teacher tries to find out what individual students want to learn).

Organization and Clarity. Extent to which class activities are clear and well organized (e.g., teacher comes to class prepared).

Student Influence. Extent to which teacher is learner-centered and allows students to participate in course planning decisions (e.g., teacher rarely dominates classroom discussion).

Twenty-two of the ACES's 49 items relate directly to teacher behavior. Although the Involvement and Affiliation subscales contain no items that refer to teacher behavior, all seven items in both the Teacher Support and Organization and Clarity subscales do.

Two forms of the ACES were developed. One, the Actual, is designed to measure the actual or "real" environment; the second, the Ideal, asks about preferred or "ideal" environment. Using the two forms of the scale, data were collected from adults in credit classes in a community college, an evening M.B.A. program, and a large adult school. According to the results, "what students want most is a learning environment characterized by involvement, teacher support, task orientation, and organization and clarity" (ibid., p. 72). What they perceive they get, however, is something different: "a social climate deficient in all these attributes" (ibid.).

Instructors also completed the Actual ACES and when compared with student ratings, data revealed discrepancies between students' and teachers' ratings of the actual classroom social environment. Teachers tended to rate it "more positive or growth-enhancing than do students" (ibid., p. 73) and "to exaggerate the extent of student involvement and their own supportive behavior" (Darkenwald 1987). These results led Darkenwald to conclude that teachers are unaware of the type of social environment students actually experience.

To determine what teachers would do about this discrepancy if they were made aware of it, Sullivan (cited in Darkenwald 1989) conducted a study that provided feedback to teachers on the results of the ACES that had been administered in their classrooms. Despite information about the discrepancies, the teachers did nothing to close the gap for two reasons: (1) many were teaching the subject for the first time and were too busy staying on top of the course and (2) they were not specifically requested to make use of the feedback.

Instructor-Generated Load

Research conducted by James (1985) and Day and James (1985), based on McClusky's concept of margin, identified categories of instructor behavior that contribute to making an adult learning environment less than optimal. According to McClusky's theory, margin is the equivalent of the relationship between demands (load) made upon an individual by self and society and the resources (power) he or she can bring to bear upon that load: Margin = Power/Load. The researchers investigated how instructors of adults increase student load thereby "contributing to the depletion of discretionary energy (margin)" (Day and James 1985, p. 40).

Information about the demands (load) instructors placed upon adult students was collected through questionnaires administered to workshop participants and semistructured interviews. A total of 54 individuals provided 157 personal examples (responses) of instructor-generated load. The responses were sorted into the following categories (adapted from James 1985, p. 12). (The number in parenthesis following the description

indicates the percentage of responses assigned to the category.)

Attitude. Instructor predisposition to respond positively or negatively to certain situations, concepts, or persons (e.g., teacher expressing a lack of confidence in students as learners). (10.19%)

Attitude/Behavior. Instructor behavior or demeanor that seems to express an attitude to the learner (e.g., teacher treating learners as inferior). (28.03%)

Behavior. Instructor's overt physical actions or demeanor (e.g., teacher waiting for an answer that just won't come). (33.76%)

Behavior/Task. Instructor behavior or demeanor that adds to the academic burden with no apparent benefit (e.g., teacher is unprepared in subject matter). (16.56%)

Environment. Physical conditions and surroundings in which the learning endeavor takes place (e.g., room too hot). (8.92%)

Task. An academically oriented burden required by the instructor (e.g., no explanation of what is expected). (2.54%)

Nearly 80% (77.9%) of the responses related in some way to the instructor's behavior, which according to James (ibid., p. 10) "tends to confirm Knowles' contention that instructor behavior plays the most significant part in establishing a learning climate." On the other hand, both the Task and the Environment categories seem to be insignificant in adult learners' perceptions of instructor-generated load, perhaps because adult learners expect academic requirements to be associated with courses and they accept the environmental aspects of a learning situation that are not under the control of the instructor (ibid.).

What Are the Practice Implications?

Given the critical nature of their role, how can instructors create optimal conditions for learning in the adult classroom? Both instructors and administrators/program planners can be involved in the effort to establish an effective instructional environment for adult learners.

Instructors can accomplish this by--

- **Becoming aware of the importance of their role in creating an effective adult classroom environment**. This knowledge may need to come from an outside source such as inservice programs that provide information about students' preferred learning environments and the frequent discrepancies between students' and instructors' perceptions of the environment (Darkenwald 1989).

- **Acknowledging that there may be many ways that they can create a more favorable learning environment by changing their behavior or attitude**. By carefully analyzing their classroom behaviors and attitudes, instructors may detect patterns or habits that they can change to improve the environment. For example, do they respect students as individuals and care about whether they learn (Darkenwald 1989)? Also, are they critical of suggestions or points of view expressed by learners (Day 1985)?

- **Understanding that concerns of learners do not just center around the content of the course**. For example, do they take into consideration other life roles and responsibilities that are characteristic of most adult students or do they convey the attitude that their class is the only thing participants do in life (Day 1985)?

- **Enlisting the help and support of the adult students in establishing an environment that is conducive to learning**. Although it is the responsibility of instructors to initiate a suitable environment, they should seek ways to involve adult students in enhancing the overall quality of the classroom climate (Darkenwald 1989). At the initial class meeting, the instructor can discuss with the students their mutual responsibility for establishing such an environment.

Administrators and program planners working with instructors can accomplish this by--

- **Offering inservice programs that create awareness of the role of the instructor in developing optimum learning environments**. These programs can introduce instructors to the concept of Margin and to the type of learning environment preferred by adults.

- **Enabling instructors to administer the ACES in their classrooms and motivating them to use the results to improve teaching-learning transactions**. If administrators stress the importance of establishing optimal learning environments and expect instructors to use the results of the ACES to narrow discrepancies between the actual and preferred learning environments, they are more likely to do so.

- **Observing instructional settings to note how instructors carry out their role in establishing the learning environment**. Such monitoring could be conducted as a part of an ongoing program of staff development and should result in constructive feedback.

- **Recruiting and hiring instructors who respect adults as learners and understand the importance of their involvement in creating an optimal learning environment**. The attitude instructors display toward their students has a significant role in creating an appropriate climate. It is much easier to develop a optimal learning environment by beginning with instructors who display a positive attitude toward adult learners.

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ERIC DIGEST No. 89

EDO-CE-89-89

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

ADULT LITERACY ISSUES: AN UPDATE

During the 1980s, increasing the literacy rate of adult Americans has been the focus of national attention. President Reagan's announcement of the Adult Literacy Initiative in September 1983 stimulated a number of new initiatives in adult literacy education, many of which focused on strengthening literacy education programs through the recruitment of volunteers. Several issues related to the adult literacy movement surfaced during the early part of the decade including the definition of adult literacy, characteristics of illiterate adults, the purposes of literacy education, the use of volunteers in literacy education programs, the impact of changing technology on literacy skills needed to function in the workplace, the need for more effective evaluation mechanisms, and the need for better linkages and communication within the field of adult literacy education (Fingeret 1984, Miller and Imel 1987).

As the decade draws to a close, several new emphases related to adult literacy education have emerged. These include efforts to influence the development of policy, and the evolution of new types of programs including family or intergenerational literacy; workplace literacy; and literacy for immigrants, for the homeless, for women, and for welfare recipients (Imel 1988). A majority of the issues that surfaced earlier are still unresolved, but new issues have surfaced and debates about some older issues have intensified as a result of the new emphases.

A previous ERIC Digest (Imel and Grieve [1984]) describes some of the early issues enumerated by Fingeret (1984) and later by Miller and Imel (1987). This ERIC Digest examines the following three issues that are the focus of debate in the current context: the appropriate focus for adult literacy education, professionalization of the field, and program evaluation.

Purpose and Goals

The economic climate of the 1980s has established a connection between literacy and economic development and "provided the framework within which we see the current attention to literacy education" (Fingeret 1988, p. 2). Concern about the nation's ability to maintain its competitiveness in a changing world market and an increasingly technological environment has exacerbated the debate about the goals and purposes of adult literacy education. The debate centers around whether the adult literacy education should serve economic development goals or whether it should be an empowering process that takes into account adult learner social backgrounds, needs, and purposes.

Jump Start (Chisman 1989), the highly publicized report recommending policy directions for adult literacy, strongly emphasizes the need for literacy to support economic development. According to the report, "the problem of adult basic skills" in the nation is so severe that the goal should clearly be to "ensure that by the year 2000, or soon thereafter, every adult has the skills needed to perform effectively the tasks required by a high-productivity economy, to the best of his or her ability" (p. 3).

Fingeret (1988) and Kazemek (1988) argue that highlighting the role of literacy in economic development places the blame for the nation's economic problems on non- or low-literate adults. The literacy for economic development perspective overlooks the fact that "structural inequalities such as unemployment are built into our social and economic systems" (Kazemek 1988, p. 473).

According to Kazemek (ibid.), too narrow a goal for literacy education ignores the perspective that literacy should have as its goal "the liberation of people for intelligent, meaningful and humane action upon the world" (p. 466). It also disregards the results of outcome studies revealing that the majority of participants enroll in adult basic education programs for educational rather than employment reasons (Fingeret 1985).

In order to reconcile these two opposing perspectives about the goal and purposes of literacy education, Fingeret (1988) suggests that "we must work together to promote a broad notion of literacy that embraces the growth of the human spirit, recognizing that full participation in the economy will accompany such personal growth" (p. 5).

Professionalization of the Field

The issue of how and why the field of adult literacy education should professionalize is currently under discussion. Although this issue has been debated by the larger field of adult education for more than two decades, developments in adult literacy education during the 1980s have sharpened the deliberations. A number of factors have converged to direct attention to the professionalization issue. These include the use of volunteer tutors, the need for an integrated system to support professional development, and a lack of consensus on what level of education and training is necessary for effective performance (Foster 1988, Kazemek 1988).

Adult illiteracy's status as a national issue has forced public acknowledgement that there are inadequate institutional and financial resources to support the development of professionals in the field. Although most adult literacy personnel have been aware of this situation for years, they now have an opportunity to participate in determining which direction professionalization of the field should take. If they do not choose to take advantage of this opportunity, standards may be imposed externally (Imel 1988).

An unresolved question, however, is how the field should professionalize. Cervero (1987) suggests that rather than professionalize like other professions, adult education should develop a model of professionalization that is consistent with its underlying belief structure. Foster (1988) expresses a similar belief: "[U]nlike some other professions . . . the professional activities associated with

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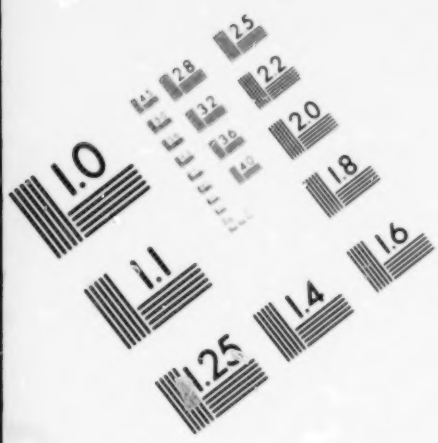

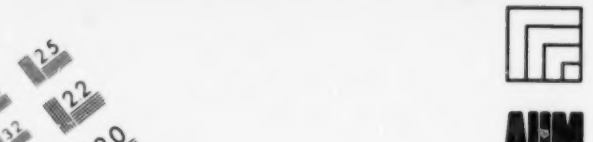

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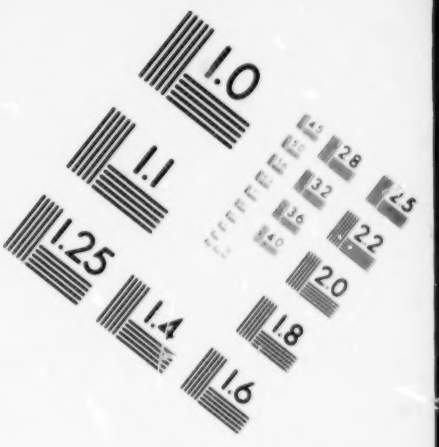

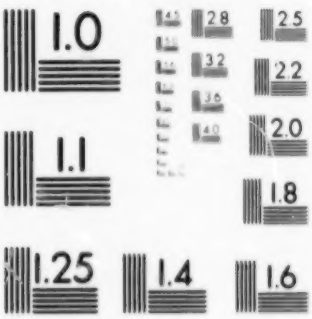

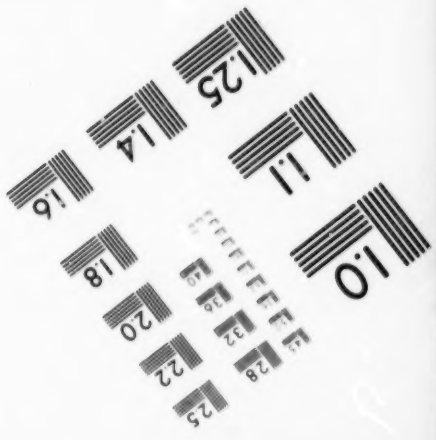

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adult literacy should not revolve around certification or restricting entry into the profession. Instead, the profession will have to be more experimental and open to innovation" (p. 21).

Evaluation of Adult Literacy Programs

The need for better, more effective evaluation of adult literacy programs and practices has been recognized for some time. Because adult literacy programs are different from the traditional school programs that teach children to read and write, they cannot be evaluated in the same way (Foster 1988, "Myth #7: Literacy Programs Are Fail-Safe" 1988). However, it is not clear how programs should be evaluated. Related to this are questions about the purposes and goals of evaluation.

Because of the connection of adult literacy to economic development goals, many evaluation studies have focused on outcomes. Fingeret (1985) feels that outcome studies are limited because they assume that the goal of literacy is employment when, in fact, participants frequently cite other kinds of goals. She suggests that the goal of literacy program evaluation should be broadened to include information about "the internal processes and dynamics of programs" (p.13). Broadening the approach to evaluation will help teachers and administrators acquire a better perspective on learners and their potential (Jones and Lowe 1986).

The pressure for better, more effective evaluation procedures is coming from both internal and external sources. Although adult literacy educators are dissatisfied with current efforts, the heightened awareness of the extent of adult illiteracy has increased demand from the public for greater accountability. Just as they should in the area of professionalization, adult literacy professionals, who know and understand the field, need to determine the purposes and goals of evaluation.

Conclusion

Although discussed separately, there are similarities among the three issues treated in this Digest. All have been debated by the profession for some time, but each has intensified as a result of the increased visibility of adult literacy education. By being proactive, rather than reactive, individuals within the profession can do much to determine the eventual resolution of each of the issues.

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ERIC DIGEST No. 103

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Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

ADULT LITERACY LEARNER ASSESSMENT

Learner assessment, the process of collecting and analyzing data provided by learners in order to make judgments about the literacy accomplishments of individuals or groups, is a key feature of adult literacy programs. Learner assessment occurs in different forms throughout an adult's participation in a literacy program. It frequently reflects different views of literacy and learning and yields distinct types of information to different stakeholders. It provides information to teachers for use in instructional planning, to learners for determining their progress toward particular goals, to program managers and staff for evaluating the impact of instruction, and to funders for establishing some degree of program accountability and success (Lytle and Wolfe 1989).

Four major types of approaches to learner assessment have been identified in the literature: standardized testing, materials based, competency based, and participatory. This ERIC Digest provides an overview of these four assessment approaches, including some issues affiliated with each. It ends with some suggested guidelines for selecting assessment procedures.

Approaches to Learner Assessment

Each of the four approaches to learner assessment described here reflects varying philosophical orientations and perspectives related to learners, literacy, and educational contexts.

Standardized Testing

Because standardized tests are relatively easy and inexpensive to administer, standardized testing is the most widely used approach in adult literacy assessment in the United States. Large groups of adults can take a test under the supervision of a comparatively small number of administrators. In addition, the training requirements to administer the test are minimal (ibid.).

By definition, a standardized test is designed to be given under specified, standard conditions. If it is not, the results are invalid (Business Council for Effective Literacy 1990; Sticht 1990). Standardized tests may be either norm- or criterion-referenced. Many of the standardized tests of reading used in adult literacy programs are norm-referenced, that is, they measure an individual's performance against a "normal" performance established by others who have taken the test (BCEL 1990; Lytle and Wolfe 1989). Criterion-referenced tests, on the other hand, assess a learner's achievement against an absolute standard or criterion of performance rather than against a norming group (Sticht 1990).

Despite their extensive use in adult literacy assessment, standardized tests have a number of critics among researchers and practitioners. According to the BCEL (1990), the "objections [to standardized tests] tend to fall into two broad categories: their intrinsic defects and their misuse" (p. 6). The major intrinsic defect is the fact that they rely on grade-level equivalents, i.e., they have been normed on children. Such measures do not reveal the extent of the life experiences and knowledge that adults bring to an instructional program nor do they provide data that can be used in developing an appropriate instructional program. Other difficulties in the use of standardized tests involve the relationship of the tests to a program's instructional model and the fact that many adults associate them with previous school failure (BCEL 1990; Lytle and Wolfe 1989).

The misuse of standardized tests relates to the practice of employing them as the sole component of program evaluation. Although learner assessment is an important component of program evaluation, a number of other elements such as program management, teaching, and curriculum need to be examined in judging program effectiveness (BCEL 1990).

Improvements that address some of their intrinsic defects are being made in standardized tests. The Degrees of Reading Power test uses cloze passages and therefore reflects more current views of the reading process as the construction of reading. Item response theory, a psychometric theory that takes into account certain factors such as item difficulty, is also being applied in some standardized tests (Lytle and Wolfe 1989).

Materials-based Assessment

Materials-based assessment refers to the practice of evaluating learners on the basis of tests following the completion of a particular set of curriculum materials. It shares some features with standardized tests such as availability through commercial publishers, ease of administration, and a view of literacy as reading skills.

Although the materials-based approach to assessment makes possible a close connection between curriculum and assessment, it creates a closed system that does not invite analysis of teaching processes and materials. Because most of the curriculum is prepackaged, there is little opportunity for learners to direct their own study. Also, the literacy activities beyond the system go unassessed and may not be recognized as meaningful by learners and teachers (Lytle and Wolfe 1989).

Competency-based Assessment

Closely related to criterion-referenced standardized testing, competency-based adult literacy assessment measures an individual's performance against a predetermined standard of acceptable performance. Progress is based on actual performance rather than on how well learners perform in comparison to others (Lytle and Wolfe 1989; Sticht 1990).

Competency-based education and assessment were developed in response to the need to assess adult literacy achievement within a functional framework. Because it recognizes the importance of prior learning and rewards what individuals can already do, it is more compatible for use with adults than standardized testing or the materials-based approach. Assessment is also frequent, providing learners with regular feedback and allowing them to advance when ready (Lytle and Wolfe 1989).

Despite its compatibility with adult education philosophy and practice, competency-based assessment also has its critics. Because competency-based assessment usually takes place within the educational setting, it is still a test given under classroom conditions; thus a key theoretical concept of successful functioning in life roles is removed from the assessment process. Some critics also contend that, like the materials-based approach, competency-based assessment systems control and restrict teaching and learning (ibid.).

Participatory Assessment

Participatory assessment is a process that views assessment as much more than testing. Features of participatory assessment include a view of literacy as practices and critical reflection, the use of a broad range of strategies in assessment, and an active role for learners in the assessment process (BCEL 1990; Lytle and Wolfe 1989). Those advocating a participatory approach do so because of a belief that "learners, their characteristics, aspirations, backgrounds, and needs should be at the center of literacy instruction" (Fingeret and Jurmo 1989, p. 5).

The following assumptions support the participatory assessment process: "the paramount purpose of assessment should be to help the learner achieve his or her goals; what is assessed must reflect what the learner wishes or needs to accomplish; the process must build on the learner's experience and strengths rather than deficits; assessment is not something done to the learner; [and] it should not be externally imposed nor shrouded in mystery, nor separated from what goes on in the regular course of learning activity" (BCEL 1990, p. 7).

Sometimes known as "alternative assessment approaches or methods" (BCEL 1990; Sticht 1990), elements of participatory assessment have been adopted by a number of adult literacy educators. The Adult Literacy Evaluation Project (ALEP) in Philadelphia is a project that includes many features of participatory assessment. This collaborative research project has developed alternatives to standardized tests and grade-level equivalences in measuring progress in literacy. The California Adult Learner Progress Evaluation Process, a joint program of the California State Libraries/California Literacy Campaign and the Educational Testing Service, also employs some participatory approaches to assessment. It uses forms developed for joint use by tutors and learners but that are written with the learner as the primary audience (Lytle and Wolfe 1989).

Despite its congruency with many of the assumptions underlying good adult education practice, participatory assessment is not without its critics. One question has to do with whether the use of alternate forms of assessment--rather than standardized tests--leads to less demanding levels of achievement. Also, sole reliance on nonstandardized methods makes it difficult to make comparisons with other programs for the purpose of program evaluation (Sticht 1990).

Conclusion

Given the plethora of approaches and instruments available for assessing adult literacy learners, what should guide the decisions about which to use? Nurss (1989) suggests the following questions be considered in selecting assessment instruments and procedures for use in adult literacy: What is the purpose of the assessment?, Is the assessment instrument appropriate for use with adults?, How reliable, practical, and valid is the instrument?, Is the instrument culturally sensitive?, and Is there congruence between the instrument/approach and the instruction.

According to Lytle and Wolfe (1989) "of prime importance seems to be the degree of congruence between particular approaches and a program's curricula and teaching practices" (p. 57). However, some interpret "the degree of congruence" to mean that both instruction and assessment should be standardized. Also, some question whether any single measure is capable of capturing the repertoire of skills and strategies an individual needs to accomplish a variety of literacy tasks.

Because of the variety of learner goals and accomplishments, multiple methods of assessment seem logical. Such an approach provides learners, teachers, and other stakeholders with multiple views of learner accomplishments.

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DIGEST
NO. 115

Adults in Career Transition

by Sandra Kerka

1991

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Job and career changes are increasingly common due to the uncertainties of the economic environment, technological changes, and new attitudes toward work. The more drastic of these transitions--changing careers--is often linked to the developmental stage of midlife. However, such changes are not limited to that age group. In fact, recent research and theory are moving away from age-related developmental models toward more individually determined stages. Other researchers are questioning the validity of linear career development models versus cyclical patterns. Still others criticize prevailing models for their lack of relevance to women and different cultural groups. This **ERIC Digest** reviews current thinking about what motivates adults to change careers and the concepts of life/career cycles. Implications of the new models for helping adults in transition are described.

Who Changes Careers and Why?

Although "midlife crisis" is a dominant image, adults experience cyclical periods of stability and transition throughout life. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) suggest that adult behavior is determined by transitions, not age. Adults are motivated to make transitions by a continual need to belong, control, master, renew, and take stock.

One explanation for transition may be found in Hughes and Graham's (1990) work in developing the Adult Life Roles Instrument. These researchers identified six life roles (relationships with self, work, friends, community, partner, and family) that go through cycles of initiation, adaptation, reassessment, and reconciliation. An individual may be at a different stage in each role simultaneously. The conflict or lack of congruence between two or more of these role cycles may spur the process of career change.

Interviews with over 500 adults (Kanchier and Unruh 1988) uncovered differences between voluntary changers ("Questers") and nonchangers ("Traditionalists"). Questers viewed jobs or careers as vehicles for self-expression and growth; they experienced cycles of entry, mastery, and disengagement. In the disengagement stage, when self-appraisal tells them the intrinsic rewards of a job no longer satisfy, Questers seek change. In contrast, Traditionalists value extrinsic rewards (position, power, money, security) that control their career choices. They are generally less introspective and open to risk than Questers.

Career change has become more socially acceptable as personal fulfillment is more highly valued. Career decision making is seen as a series of continuous choices across the life span, not a once-and-for-all event. Thus, careers may be viewed as a spiral sequence of all life roles, with changes triggered by factors ranging from the anticipated (marriage, empty nest) to unanticipated (illness, divorce, layoff) to "nonevents" (a marriage or promotion that did not occur) (Leibowitz and Lea 1985). Other reasons that people seek change are that their initial career was not their own choice, their original aspirations were not met, there is insufficient time for other life roles, or the present career is incongruent with changed values or interests. Longer life expectancy, changing views of retirement, and economic necessity are other factors.

Personal reactions to transition vary. Whether the career change is voluntary or involuntary, people may experience a variety of emotions such as fear, anxiety, or a sense of loss. Phases of transition may include immobilization, denial, self-doubt, letting go, testing options, searching for meaning, and integration and renewal (Leibowitz and Lea 1985). The close relationship between career and identify may necessitate reformulating one's self-concept when making a career change.

New Models of Career Development

The traditional linear career development model--education-employment-retirement--very likely accounts "for less than one-third of all careers" (Leach and Chakiris 1988, p. 52). New ways of looking at life/career cycles that better explain adults' developmental diversity are needed. Leach and Chakiris elaborate on three types of careers: linear, free form, and mixed form. Linear careers follow the traditional pattern of education-work-retirement. Free-form careers include work for pay (such as permanent or temporary part-time jobs, consulting, entrepreurial activity) or unpaid work. Mixed-form careerists are involved in transitions between linear and free-form patterns. The temporarily or permanently unemployed, underemployed, and those undergoing training or retraining in preparation for a career fall into this category.

In her work with adults as learners, Cross identified three types of "life plans" (*Perspectives on Adult Education* 1988):

- Linear life plan--education when young, work through the middle years, leisure when elderly
- Redistribution of work, education, and leisure into recurring cycles
- Blended life plan--combining leisure, work, and study activities concurrently throughout life

She sees the trend toward longer, healthier life spans resulting in greater emphasis on the blended life plan.

Given these diverse career and life forms, the developmental tasks for each adult differ with age, social role, and culture. Age-related life-cycle theories have been criticized by Eastmond (1991), Hughes and Smith (1985), and others because they are often inappropriate for women and minorities.

Women may accomplish the same developmental tasks as men, but often in different periods of the life-cycle. Forrest and Mikolaitis (1986) argue for the inclusion of a different component in women's career development--self in relation to others--that accounts for women's experience of the world. Ethnic minorities' career development is influenced by their differential experience of home, school, and the workplace; the kinds of transitions they undergo may not correspond to linear or age-related patterns (Hughes and Smith 1985).

Helping Adults in Career Transition

These new ways of looking at life/career cycles and the transition process suggest approaches for assisting adults contemplating career change. The multifaceted approach proposed by Hughes and Graham (1990) requires recognizing the developmental stages of adults' multiple life roles and their interaction. The search for a new career involves not only matching the person to the work, but also fitting the "occupational career" into the "life career" (Leibowitz and Lea 1985).

According to Sargent and Schlossberg (1988), adult readiness for change depends on four factors: self, situation, support, and strategies. Counselors can help adults in transition assess (1) self--personal responses to change; (2) situation--changes in roles, relationships, routines, assumptions; (3) support--does a range of sources exist? were they disrupted by transition?; and (4) strategies--taking action to change the situation, change its meaning, or change oneself.

A variety of coping skills for managing transition are necessary (Leibowitz and Lea 1985). These skills include--

--perceiving and responding to transitions
--developing and using internal and external support systems
--reducing emotional and physiological distress
--planning and implementing change

A holistic approach to transition management includes the following components:

- receiving psychological, marital, and family counseling
- assessing interests, values, and skills (using gender- and culturally appropriate instruments
- obtaining information about careers
- learning about educational and training opportunities
- identifying and overcoming resource barriers such as financial need and child care

A computerized career guidance system such as SIGI PLUS (System of Interactive Guidance and Information) can also be of value. Norris, Shatkin, and Katz (1991) describe how SIGI was modified in recognition of the fact that career decision making is lifelong and, for adults, more complex. Components of SIGI PLUS encompass both occupational and nonoccupational factors, because such factors as family mobility and investment in education, training, and social/community activities may inhibit adults' flexibility in career choice. The Coping component recognizes the practical problems and barriers to training and career entry facing adults.

If, as Leach and Chakiris (1988) suggest, periodic unemployment will be experienced by most of the working population at some time in their lives, career and life role transitions will be everyone's concern. They suggest helping people make distinctions between jobs, work, and careers; place greater value on noneconomic work roles; and recognize transitions as an inevitable part of life and a continual challenge for redefining oneself.

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DIGEST
NO. 113

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

Collaborative Learning in Adult Education

by Susan Imel

1991

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One of the most frequently mentioned characteristics of adult education is the fact that it should be collaborative or participatory in nature (Brookfield 1986). Support for collaboration and participation in adult learning is based upon a philosophical approach to adult education emerging from the progressive education movement, one of several movements upon which adult education's philosophical foundations are based (Elias and Merriam 1980). Although the need for collaboration and participation is emphasized in much of the adult education literature, there is little empirical support for collaborative learning (CL) as the best way to educate adults; there is also little discussion of collaborative learning itself, that is, what it is, how it is implemented, and its strengths and weaknesses. This **ERIC Digest** provides an overview of collaborative learning and describes how the process of collaborative learning can become a part of formal or institutionalized adult education activities (as opposed to autonomous or independent adult learning groups).

What Is Collaborative Learning?

The following form the basis for CL:

- Both facilitators and learners become active participants in the educational process.
- The hierarchy between facilitators and learners is eliminated.
- A sense of community is created.
- Knowledge is created, not transferred.
- Knowledge is considered to be located in the community rather than in the individual (Whipple 1987).

CL has its origins in a number of movements and philosophies, most of which have influenced progressive adult education. It draws heavily from the schools of experiential learning and student-centered learning that are based on the work of the philosopher, Dewey, and the social psychologists, Piaget and Vygotsky. It also uses information from the field of social psychology, particularly small group theory advanced by Lewin. Critical thinking, as a form of education, and problem-centered learning have also contributed to CL (MacGregor 1990; Sheridan 1989).

Collaborative learning assumes that knowledge is socially, rather than individually, constructed by communities of individuals and that the shaping and testing of ideas is a process in which anyone can participate (MacGregor 1990; Novotny, Seifert, and Werner 1991). Furthermore, it stresses the importance of common inquiry in learning, a process through which learners begin to experience knowledge as something that is created rather than something that is transmitted from the facilitator or teacher to the learner (Sheridan 1989).

CL addresses the issue of how authority is distributed and experienced in the learning setting (Bruffee 1987). The preeminent idea behind CL is that learning is significantly enhanced when knowledge that is created and transmitted is shaped by the activities and perspectives of the group, so the facilitator's role as an authority and source of knowledge is reduced (Romer 1985).

How Can Collaborative Learning Be Facilitated?

Adult learning in formal or structured settings, however collaborative, differs from the autonomous learning that adults choose to do because the facilitator usually designs and structures activities to ensure that maximum learning occurs (Bruffee 1987). Thus, it becomes the responsibility of the instructor to create a climate in which CL can occur. Three important elements to foster CL in formal settings are the environment, the role of the facilitator, and the role of the learners. Although the three are intertwined, they are discussed separately.

The Collaborative Learning Environment

CL can take place only in an environment in which participants feel free to exchange ideas and share experiences in order to create knowledge. Therefore, the environment should be unthreatening and democratic, discouraging hostile competition as well as encouraging mutual respect for the ideas and opinions of others (Sheridan 1989). To create this environment, learners must be willing to listen to and respect different points of view as well as tolerate divergent opinions, engage in discussion and conversation rather than speech making and debate, take on and exercise the authority relinquished by the facilitator, and develop a sense of commitment and responsibility to the group. In turn, facilitators must be willing to surrender complete authority for the learning process and become co-learners with other participants (Bruffee 1987; MacGregor 1990; Romer 1985).

Although in adult learning activities facilitators and learners are jointly responsible for establishing the environment, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to take the lead. Brookfield (1986) has observed that one of the facilitator's most demanding tasks is "to assist in the development of a group culture in which adults can feel free to challenge one another and feel comfortable with being challenged" (p. 14). Without such an environment, CL cannot occur.

The Role of the Facilitator

CL calls for a reframing of the traditional teacher role as the authority and transmitter of knowledge. In CL, the teacher becomes a facilitator and enters into a process of mutual inquiry, relating to students as a knowledgeable co-learner; authority, expertise, power, and control are redefined (MacGregor 1990; Sheridan 1989). For facilitators assuming this role, MacGregor suggests that "particularly challenging is the process of reconciling one's sense of responsibility about course coverage with one's commitment to enabling students to learn on their own" (p. 26). Facilitators must develop methods of sharing their expertise without usurping the attempts of learners to acquire their own.

In addition to taking the lead in establishing an appropriate environment for CL, the facilitator has other responsibilities, two of which are preparing learners for collaborative work and planning for CL. Learners will need to become familiar with the process of CL, develop skills in collaboration and acquire enough content background to permit them to work in a collaborative learning situation. Not all adults are accustomed to collaborative learning situations, and facilitators have a responsibility to describe CL and provide a rationale for its use as well as any training needed to engage in it effectively. Facilitators also need to prepare learners in terms of the content by providing them with a common framework and background from which to begin (MacGregor 1990).

In planning for CL, the facilitator must consider where and in how much of the learning activity collaboration is appropriate; establish and communicate clear objectives; use suitable techniques; prepare content materials, including developing meaningful questions or problems for group work; structure groups; and provide a clear sense of expected outcomes of group work (MacGregor 1990; Sheridan 1989).

The Role of Learners

CL also calls for significant role shifts for the student: from listener, observer, and note taker to problem solver, contributor, and discussant; from low or moderate to high expectations for class preparation; from a private to a public classroom presence; from attendance dictated by personal choice to that having to do with the expectations of the collaborative learning group; from competition to collaboration with peers; from responsibilities associated with learning independently to those associated with learning interdependently; and from viewing teachers and texts as the sole sources of authority and knowledge to viewing peers, oneself, and the thinking of the group as additional, important sources of authority and knowledge (MacGregor 1990, p. 25). Facilitators can prepare learners for these shifts in their roles, including the need to assume greater responsibility for their own learning.

What Issues Are Affiliated with Collaborative Learning?

CL is not without problems and issues. Those most frequently mentioned in the literature include cultural biases toward competition and individualism that militate against collaboration, the traditional class structure that frequently does not allow sufficient time for true collaboration to occur or for group members to establish trust and a sense of group security, the difficulty in providing feedback that accommodates the needs of both the group and the individual, the reluctance of learners to accept their peers as legitimate sources of knowledge, the inability of facilitators to relinquish their traditional role, and the development of appropriate and meaningful collaborative learning tasks (Bruffee 1987; MacGregor 1990; McKinley 1983; Novotny, Seifert, and Werner 1991; Sheridan 1989). Because they did not give sufficient time and attention to this last issue, some adult educators have been accused of providing "warm and fuzzy" learning experiences that did not necessarily result in any real learning (Sheridan 1989).

What Are the Key Benefits of Collaborative Learning?

Collaborative learning--

- provides an environment for democratic planning, decision making, and risk taking
- allows participants to acquire insights into the potential and power of groups as well as develop their independence as learners
- helps individuals develop better judgment through the exposure and resolution of previously unshared biases
- enables adults to draw on their previous experiences by tapping their reservoir of accumulated wisdom and knowledge (Brookfield 1986; Bruffee 1987; Martin 1990; Novotny, Seifert, and Werner 1991).

As yet, there is little empirical evidence on the effectiveness of CL as it relates to learning outcomes in adult education. However, research at the primary and secondary levels reveals that students learn better through noncompetitive, collaborative group work than in classrooms that are highly individualized and competitive (Bruffee 1987). Whether or not this is true with adults is still largely untested.

Because of the lack of empirical support for CL, it is unclear whether it should be adopted more widely in adult education. As an approach, CL represents a philosophical perspective about the appropriate goals and methods of education. Adult educators choosing to employ CL should be fully aware of the related issues and problems as well as the careful planning and preparation needed to implement it effectively.

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DIGEST NO. 116

Ethical Practice in Adult Education

by Susan Imel

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Unlike other fields with a strong service orientation, adult education has only recently begun to consider the role of ethics and its relationship to practice. Adult educators continually make decisions and solve problems related to practice, but discussions about ethics have been impeded because of the field's diversity and the tendency to focus on its learner-centered nature rather than its practices (Brockett 1988b, Cervero 1989, Sork 1988b). In describing the importance of ethics to the field, Sork (1988b) suggests that "a consideration of the ethics of practice is inescapable if anything approaching a complete understanding of practice is ever to be achieved" (p. 393).

This **ERIC Digest** describes some of the ethical dilemmas that are inherent in the education of adults and provides ideas that should be helpful in decision making relative to ethical issues faced by adult educators. Following a discussion of the ethical dimensions of adult education practice, selected ethical dilemmas in teaching and program planning are described. The digest concludes with some suggestions for promoting ethical practice in adult education.

Ethical Dimensions of Adult Education Practice

By its nature, the practice of adult education is an endeavor in which "ethical choices are not some abstract ideal but are embedded in the very fabric of practice" (Cervero 1989, p. 110). Because ethics is the process of deciding what should be done, the choices adult educators continually make such as what individuals are to learn or how programs are to be developed reflect the ethical nature of their practice (Brown 1990, Cervero 1989).

Many practice situations are characterized by ambiguity and conflicting values, thereby preventing adult educators from applying standardized principles as solutions. Instead, educators begin to make choices that are based on their beliefs about the way things ought to be (Cervero 1989). However, these choices are frequently made without reflecting on the value judgments and assumptions that implicitly operate throughout the decision-making process (Brown 1990).

Brockett (1988a, 1990) has proposed a model for helping adult educators think about their decision making relative to ethical issues. Consisting of three interrelated dimensions or levels of ethical practice, the model describes a process that allows adult educators to draw upon their basic values in making practice decisions. Rather than providing prescriptive guidelines, the model helps people discover the best course of action for themselves, which is better than telling people what to do (Brown 1990).

The model's three dimensions are personal value system, consideration of multiple responsibilities, and operationalization of values. The first dimension--personal value system--helps adult educators answer the questions, "What do I believe and how committed am I to those beliefs?" This dimension reinforces the fact that ethical practice begins with an understanding of personal values (Brockett 1988a, 1990).

Consideration of multiple responsibilities, the second dimension, revolves around the question, "To whom am I responsible as an adult educator?" Because of the nature of their work, adult educators are responsible to a number of parties, including learners, employers and employing organizations, professional colleagues, and society. This dimension helps them to consider the options or choices available in meeting what are frequently conflicting needs (ibid.).

The third dimension, operationalization of values, asks "How do I put my values into practice?" Although this dimension can involve the development of a formal code of ethics, the translation of values into practice in adult education has tended to be more informal. Brockett (1990, p. 9) says that a "way of putting values into practice is to identify basic moral principles that lie at the heart of one's practice," suggesting the following six principles to guide practice:

- **Respect**--Do I respect the learners with whom I work?
- **Justice**--Is there equity in service to learners?
- **Obligations to clients**--Are the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved shared and considered?
- **Beneficence**--Are harmful outcomes minimized and positive outcomes maximized?
- **Caring**--Do I really care about the learners with whom I work?
- **Self-awareness**--Am I able and willing to reflect on my own adult education practice?

Ethical Dilemmas in Adult Education Practice

Whether they acknowledge them or not, adult educators encounter ethical dilemmas in their practice on a daily basis. Some common ethical dilemmas that occur in teaching adults and in program planning are described and discussed in this section.

Ethical Dilemmas in Teaching

Caffarella (1988), who suggests that ethical dilemmas are an inevitable part of teaching adults, examines them in terms of Brockett's model. The first dimension, personal value system, affects how individuals teach, what they teach, and how they interact with their students. Teachers' personal value systems will influence whether they emphasize learners' strengths or inadequacies; whether they treat students equally regardless of race, gender, ethnic origin, or creed; and whether they believe adults can learn regardless of age, social class, and previous learning experiences.

A teacher may encounter an ethical dilemma when his/her personal value system regarding the appropriate conduct of the learning situation conflicts with that of students. For example, teachers who have a humanistic view of people usually perceive their teaching role to be that of facilitator, tend to be more student directed in their teaching, and think of themselves as catalysts in the learning process. However, some students may resent this approach and expect the teacher to use lectures and tests rather than develop their skills as self-directed learners

(Caffarella 1988). The teacher faced with this dilemma must decide whether to abandon, modify, or stay on course with the approach that is consistent with his/her personal view of human nature.

In terms of the second dimension, consideration of multiple responsibilities, Caffarella points out that teaching adults is seldom a full-time occupation. Ethical dilemmas may occur when other responsibilities conflict with teaching or are given a higher priority than the teaching role. Individuals whose teaching role is secondary to other responsibilities may need to examine their motives for teaching adults as well as whether they can take time from their major roles to prepare adequately for teaching.

In discussing how teachers operationalize their values in the practice of their craft, Caffarella addresses the third dimension of Brockett's model. In addition to discussing dilemmas that arise from personal value systems and multiple responsibilities, she suggests that teachers also need to model ethical behavior in teaching. According to Caffarella, this practice "requires all participants in the learning activity, teachers and students alike, to be willing to question what is being taught and how the subject matter is being addressed" (p. 114). An important part of this process is considering the ethical questions affiliated with the subject matter under discussion.

Ethical Dilemmas in Program Planning

Program planning in adult education is a complicated, multistep process requiring numerous decisions at many points. Like that of teachers, decision making by program planners is influenced not only by their own value systems but also by their responsibilities to multiple audiences who may have differing expectations for program development processes and outcomes. Sork (1988a) points out that "ethical issues arise in program planning when any of the alternatives under consideration are associated with value positions that may be viewed as unacceptable by society, other practitioners, clients, sponsors, or planners themselves" (p. 34).

Two areas of ethical dilemmas encountered in program planning described by Sork (ibid.) are the following:

- **Those affiliated with needs.** Two areas of dilemmas associated with needs include (1) responding to "felt" or "expressed" needs and (2) basing a program on needs unacknowledged by the adult learner. In the first, the autonomy of the learner is taken into consideration, but the planner may have to make a decision about which of many needs it is feasible to address or may be confronted with expressed needs that are potentially harmful. In the second, the planner may be faced with violating the autonomy of the learner while addressing the needs of some other entity such as employers or society.
- **Those related to fee structures.** Because decisions about pricing and fees have a bearing on a learner's ability and willingness to pay for educational programs, they are ethically significant. For example, a programmer may be faced with making a price decision that will eliminate many who might benefit most from programs because they are often those who can afford it the least. Yet, if a programmer employs the "Robin Hood principle," in which he/she charges more for programs designed for those who can afford it in order to subsidize programs for those less able to pay, is that ethically defensible?

Promoting Ethical Practice in Adult Education

Clearly, ethics are an integral part of adult education practice, but adult educators need to develop a greater awareness and sensitivity to ethical issues. Brockett (1990) suggests the following ideas for promoting ethical practice in adult education:

- **Self-examination.** The starting point for understanding the ethics of practice is found in personal value systems but these must be articulated. Writing down and reflecting on one's personal philosophy of adult education is a helpful process for helping clarify personal beliefs.
- **Reflect on ethics in practice.** Finding time for personal and group reflection on ethical issues is important because it helps uncover ethical dilemmas and resolve conflicts before they arise.
- **Examine the practices of other professions.** Learning how other professions deal with ethical dilemmas can lead to more insights about the ethics of adult education practice. Although this approach may be helpful, Brockett warns against uncritical adoption of practices that are incompatible with adult education's philosophical approaches.
- **Encourage and support a research agenda on ethics.** Research can lead to greater understanding of ethical issues in adult education and provide information that will help adult educators respond to them.

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ERIC DIGEST No. 77

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH ADULT LEARNERS

Between 1969 and 1984, the number of adults participating in educational programs increased 79 percent, and the number of activities doubled (Hill 1987). The growth of adult education is being stimulated by a number of broad demographic, economic, and societal trends including the following:

- The increased realization that adults continue to change and grow throughout their lives and frequently seek assistance in dealing with these changes
- The greater proportion of adults in the total population due to increased longevity and declining birthrates
- The higher demand for occupational and professional training due to the presence of the baby boom generation in the work force
- The growing need for job retraining caused by economic and technological changes that have eliminated some jobs and revised the nature of many others

This **ERIC Digest**, a revision of Fact Sheet No. 25 (Imel [1982]), provides guidelines to consider when developing educational programs for adults in any setting. It focuses on the characteristics of adults that affect learning, describing how to develop a climate that is conducive to adult learning as well as identifying appropriate evaluation strategies. Brief reviews of some recent resources conclude the **Digest**.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Adults possess characteristics that influence how they learn and that should be considered when developing instructional programs. Although it is important to realize that each adult is an individual, some generalizations can be applied to adult learners. Through a review of the literature on adult learners, Kalamas (1987) identified the following:

- **Individuals Can Learn throughout Their Lives.** Unfortunately, adults are frequently their own worst enemies when it comes to doubting their ability to learn new things. Older adults, particularly, may need encouragement to engage in learning activities. One advantage adults have over youth in their ability to learn is a broad range of experience. These experiences enhance their ability to perceive, process, and use information and provide a foundation for gaining additional knowledge.
- **Adult Life Cycles Influence Learning.** Every adult progresses through a series of life phases. In each phase of life, certain behaviors and skills—known as developmental tasks—need to be learned. Life-cycle phases influence how individuals approach learning as well as what they want or need to learn. Designers of instructional programs should consider the developmental needs of adult learners at specific developmental stages. (See Naylor [1985] for more information about adult development.)
- **Adults Learn What They Consider Important.** Adult learning is usually motivated by the need to acquire a new skill or make a decision. When adults perceive a need to learn something, they are generally capable of working very hard. Since most adult learning is voluntary, adults also have the prerogative of dropping out of programs that do not meet their needs.
- **Adults Are Often Time-Conscious Learners.** Adults have many roles (e.g., spouse, parent, employee, community member) in addition to that of learner. Therefore, most want to meet their educational goals as directly, quickly, and efficiently as possible.
- **What Is Important Varies among Adults.** Adults engage in educational programs for a variety of reasons. Most—75 percent—enroll for job-related reasons, but others take nonoccupational courses for personal or social reasons (Hill 1987). Because adults know what goals are important to them, they tend to do best in educational experiences that provide what they value.
- **Adults Wish to Be Treated as Such—Sometimes.** By adulthood, individuals have developed an independent view of self, and most adults want to be treated as if they were responsible individuals with the capacity to determine things for themselves. Adult learning situations should be designed to allow adults to retain as much autonomy as possible. Because some adults have experienced only structured and teacher-centered learning environments, they may need assistance in accepting responsibility for their own learning.
- **Biological Changes May Affect Learning.** Although adults can continue to learn throughout their lives, physical changes may need to be considered when planning and conducting educational activities. Biological changes such as speed and reaction time, visual and auditory acuity, and intellectual functioning may all affect learning.

Creating a Climate for Adult Learning

Creating a learning environment that meets the needs of adult learners is a key element of successful adult education programs. The challenge is to create a nonthreatening atmosphere in which adults have permission and are expected to share in the responsibility for their learning. Following are some strategies for accomplishing this:

- **Establish Adult-to-Adult Rapport.** To build rapport with adults in the learning environment, use positive nonverbal communication, deal with the whole person, address learners as equals, share authority, and employ informal room arrangements such as placing all the chairs in a circle, in a U, or around a table. Adult students also appreciate instructors who share appropriate information about themselves and who are approachable and accessible.
- **Create a Participatory Environment.** A participatory environment, which helps learners assume responsibility for their own learning, can be created by involving the learners in deciding on course content and establishing class management guidelines, having learners serve as instructional resources, and monitoring learner satisfaction throughout the activity. Providing multiple learning options, which enables learners to choose those methods

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and materials best suited to their needs, will also encourage participation.

- **Facilitate Adult Independence.** Instructors can help adults assume more responsibility for their own learning by encouraging them to learn on their own, serving as a role model of an independent adult learner, and teaching decision-making and problem-solving techniques.
- **Provide for Individual Differences.** Because they have an independent self-concept, adults view themselves as individuals, and it is important to acknowledge adults as individuals in the educational setting. Individual differences can be accommodated by using a variety of instructional techniques, providing appropriate and varied instructional materials, relating instruction to learners' experience, and adjusting for physiological and psychological differences.

Evaluating Adult Learning

Although many adult learning activities do not require formal evaluation procedures, adult learners need to learn how to identify and evaluate their own resources, abilities, and knowledge realistically. When formal evaluation is required, "[e]valuation strategies for adults are most effective when traditional authority roles are de-emphasized, and the learner's role as an autonomous, responsible adult is emphasized" (Kopp 1987, p. 50). Adults should be involved not only in determining what they learn but also in identifying and establishing their own evaluation techniques.

Kopp suggests the following three collaborative approaches that can be used in establishing a basis for evaluation.

1. **Group decision making** in which class members participate jointly in identifying and selecting evaluation strategies to be used.
2. **Learning contracts** that help learners clarify their objectives, document their learning and evaluation plans, and commit themselves to the work they have contracted to do.
3. **Grading contracts** that provide learners with options in the relative weight of evaluation activities and in the amount of work they will perform.

Resources on Adult Learning

A number of recent publications can be used in designing programs for adult learners. In addition to those listed in the References, the following books will serve as helpful resources for those seeking more information on this aspect of adult education.

- **Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn** (Wlodkowski 1985) presents 68 motivational strategies designed to increase adult learning in a wide variety of settings. Also described are the characteristics and skills of a motivating instructor.
- **Helping Adults Learn** (Knox 1986) is a comprehensive guide to all aspects of planning, implementing, and evaluating programs for adult learners. The book includes practical "how-to" advice that is supported by examples from practice as well as checklists and guidelines to be used in program development.
- **Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning** (Brookfield 1986) critically examines and analyzes current approaches to adult learning, presents a comprehensive review of how adults learn, and proposes ways to develop more creative, up-to-date adult education programs. Brookfield explores what he calls the "theory-practice disjunctions" between theories-in-use and espoused theories.

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ERIC DIGEST No. 102

EDO-CE-90-102 Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

LOCATING AND SELECTING INFORMATION: A GUIDE FOR ADULT EDUCATORS

The term **information society** has become a cliche but the fact of the matter is we are living in an age in which we are bombarded with information. In his book **Information Anxiety**, Richard Wurman (1989) accurately describes how many of us feel when surrounded with vast amounts of data that do not provide the required knowledge. According to Wurman, the following situations are likely to produce information anxiety: not understanding information, feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information to be understood, not knowing if certain information exists, not knowing where to find information, and knowing exactly where to find information but not having the key to access it (ibid., p. 44).

No matter what their role, knowing how to identify, select, and evaluate information resources are important processes for adult educators. They need to be aware of a wide range of possible resources. In addition, they must be able to sift through and evaluate their relevance. This **ERIC Digest** describes where adult educators can find information resources and suggests strategies for accessing information. It ends with some guidelines for selecting the most appropriate information.

Information Sources for Adult Educators

Two of the main sources of information related to adult education are information databases and clearinghouses or resource centers. Libraries--particularly college and university libraries located at institutions with graduate programs in adult and continuing education--are also sources of adult education information, but they will not be discussed here. Individuals can inquire at their local libraries about the availability of specific resources, for example, online databases or books.

Information Databases

Information databases store collections of related information that can be retrieved via computer using information retrieval software. When stored, the materials have usually been indexed or classified using a vocabulary control device, i.e., a thesaurus, a list of subject headings, or a specialized classification scheme, to facilitate their retrieval. This controlled vocabulary is used to retrieve information from a database (Niemi and Imel 1987).

A large number of existing databases contain information useful to adult educators. Two comprehensive references that can be used in selecting the most appropriate database are the ***Encyclopedia of Information Systems and Services, 10th Edition*** (1990) and ***Dialapro Directory of On-Line Services*** (1990). Both provide information about a variety of online databases and are available at many libraries.

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database is considered to be the primary source for adult education due both to its purpose and its history of service to the field. ERIC has been collecting and classifying all types of educational materials since 1966. Its focus is on fugitive materials (those that are not otherwise readily available) such as pamphlets, conference proceedings and papers, curriculum materials, research studies, and reports of government-funded projects. More than 700 education-related journals, including all major adult education journals published both in the United States and abroad, are scanned regularly to select articles for inclusion in the database (Imel 1989; Niemi and Imel 1987). Over 14,000 items indexed with the term **adult education** have been included in the ERIC database since 1966.

The availability of microcomputers and the packaging of the ERIC database in CD-ROM (compact disk-read only memory) format make ERIC more accessible to the general public. Many individuals are choosing to search ERIC without the assistance of a professional searcher using microcomputers or CD-ROM equipment. A subject search of ERIC results in bibliographic information plus an abstract of all information in the ERIC database on the topic (Imel 1989).

Clearinghouses and Resource Centers

Several clearinghouses and resource centers disseminate information about adult education to a variety of audiences including administrators, teachers, researchers, students, and the general public. Some of these organizations, such as the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education (ERIC/ACVE) are national in scope. Others, such as AdvancE (Pennsylvania's adult education resource center and clearinghouse), are state-level organizations. Some of the functions provided by clearinghouses and resource centers include searches of information databases, information about resources, collections of materials, and referral to other agencies and organizations serving adult learners. Many also develop and make available newsletters and free and inexpensive materials related to adult education resources. ***The Directory of National Clearinghouses: Resource Centers and Clearinghouses Serving Adult Educators and Learners*** (1990) provides information about national clearinghouses and resource centers.

Strategies for Accessing Resources

Knowing where resources are located is one piece of the information puzzle, but this knowledge is best used in combination with some strategies to begin helping you access the most appropriate resources. Such questions as How much information do you need?, How much do you already know about the topic?, How much time and money do you have to devote to this task?, and How do you plan to use the information? can assist in selecting the best strategy to begin your information search.

Two common strategies used to identify information resources include asking other people and searching information databases. Sometimes the best place to begin a search is by getting

touch with someone who is familiar with the area. This strategy may be particularly useful if you know little or nothing about the topic. Most adult educators are more than happy to share information about their work, including key information sources. Adult education resource center and clearinghouse personnel are frequently able to help you identify information sources. These individuals work with adult education information resources on a daily basis and are knowledgeable about new materials. They may be able to refer you to other sources of information as well.

A second strategy for locating information is by searching information databases. Most information databases can be accessed both manually and by computer, and many are available in CD-ROM format.

Manual searching. Manual searching refers to the process of using print indexes or catalogs to identify resources. Although not as efficient as computer searching, it may be more effective, especially if you only need a small amount of material or if you are unfamiliar with the topic. A manual search permits the luxury of browsing that the cost of computer searching prohibits. The tradeoff, however, is the cost of the time devoted to the task. Another drawback to manual searching is the fact that you can only search under one subject heading at a time.

Computer searching. Computer searching can be both efficient and effective, provided you know what you are looking for. Computer searching is the most efficient means of retrieving a large amount of information on a topic because it allows you to combine two or more subjects. It can also permit you to limit your search to certain types of material such as research, project descriptions, and curricula. If you have not sufficiently refined your topic, however, it can result in irrelevant material. If you are unfamiliar with the database you wish to search, it is best to consult a professional searcher before attempting a search.

CD-ROM searching. Searching using CD-ROM combines many of the best features of both manual and computer searching. Because there are no online charges being incurred, it can provide the luxury of browsing at the same time it provides the efficiency of computer searching. Because of the time needed to print out citations, CD-ROM is not the best medium for large searches. Also, the demands placed on many CD-ROM stations available to the public may mean limited access.

Selecting Information Sources

Selecting potential sources of information once they have been identified is another step in process. How selective you wish to be may depend on a number of factors such as the amount of material uncovered in your search, the use to which you intend to put the information, and the availability of the sources.

Barrows (1987) suggests weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each source in terms of the following:

- **Availability.** Is the source obtainable?
- **Accessibility.** How easy is it to acquire the source?
- **Time.** How long will it take to get it?
- **Effort.** How much trouble will it be to get it?
- **Cost.** How much will it cost?

Although important in terms of the feasibility of acquiring sources, these criteria have nothing to do with evaluating the substantive nature of the resource. The following guidelines can be used to evaluate and select resources based on their content:

- **Authority of source.** Is the author an established leader in the field? Is it published by an organization that is known for contributing to the field?
- **Timeliness.** Is the information current and up to date? Is it based on current references?
- **Relevance.** Does the source deal with the topic in a contemporary manner? Does the source contain the type of information you need?
- **Depth.** Is the topic treated in sufficient detail to be of use?
- **Accuracy.** Based on what you already know about the topic, is the information correct and reliable?
- **Replicability.** If you are planning to use the material for the purpose of replication, does the source contain information that can be used in other settings?

These criteria should be considered guidelines, not hard and fast rules, when selecting sources. Depending on how you will be using the information, some may be more important than others. For example, if a source meets all the other criteria, the fact that you are unfamiliar with the author or the producer may be irrelevant.

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ERIC DIGEST No. 98

EDO-CE-90-98

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

MANAGING YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT A GUIDE FOR PART-TIME TEACHERS OF ADULTS

Professional development is a continuing process consisting of activities that enhance professional growth. It may include workshops, independent reading and study, conferences, and consultation with peers and experts. Since its primary purpose is to benefit the individual, professional development should be planned and managed by the individual. As a part-time teacher of adults, you may develop your professional development plan in consultation with your supervisor, and you may receive help from others in evaluating and modifying teaching practices. On the other hand, since you may be working in relative isolation from other teachers and administrators, you may need to take sole responsibility for your professional development (Jones and Lowe 1982). Whether you work collaboratively or individually, you should be involved in identifying your professional development needs and in deciding what strategies to use to address those needs. Developed in conjunction with the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, this **ERIC Digest** provides information that you can use in planning and managing your professional development. First, the following aspects of professional development are covered: developing a plan, identifying resources, and receiving feedback. Some research- and practice-based guidelines that can be used in managing your professional development activities conclude the **Digest**.

Aspects of Professional Development

Taking charge of your professional development means that you will take responsibility for planning and carrying out a number of activities. Three important aspects of professional development--developing a plan, locating resources, and receiving feedback--are described here.

Developing a Plan

Developing a plan for professional development is essential because it will encourage you to address your professional self-improvement activities in a proactive manner. It will also provide a framework for the discipline and commitment needed to achieve the planned changes inherent in any professional development program (Jones and Lowe 1985).

The Personal Professional Development Model (Jones and Lowe 1982, 1985) is a planning process that has been used successfully by part-time teachers in achieving their professional development goals. The model consists of four phases: initiating, planning, managing, and evaluating. Three of the stages are reflective, that is, they involve contemplation and reflection to answer a series of questions. In only one stage--managing--is there activity. Each phase is accomplished by addressing a series of steps as follows:

Initiating Phase (Reflective)

- What do I hope to accomplish?
- What are my learning objectives?
- What is my potential payoff?

Planning Phase (Reflective)

- What resources are available to me?
- What will be my learning activities?
- How will I judge the success of this project?

Managing Phase (Active)

- Complete each activity in the planning phase
- Organize and interpret data
- Record progress and/or report findings

Evaluative Phase (Reflective after the fulfillment of plan)

- To what extent did I achieve my objectives?
- To what extent did I select and pursue appropriate learning activities?
- What are my learning needs now? (Jones and Lowe 1985, p. 82)

Answering the questions in the initiating and planning phases can help commit you to a plan of action for your professional development. The managing and evaluative phases can be used to describe the outcomes of your project.

Teachers who used this model reported a number of advantages. First, they accomplished more because the model contributed to their organization and discipline in achieving their objectives. The model also provided structure and emphasized their responsibility for their own learning. Finally, the model reduced procrastination (Jones and Lowe 1985).

Identifying Resources

Successful implementation of a professional development plan requires resources. You will need to identify the resources to carry out your professional development plan. These resources might include print and nonprint materials, staff development opportunities, and other adult educators.

In New Mexico, adult basic education teachers engaged in self-directed professional development activities found human resources to be of key importance in their projects. Books and articles were also essential in their learning, and several used structured activities such as workshops or classes in accomplishing their goals (Smith and Bowes 1986).

Receiving Feedback

Another important aspect of professional development is feedback. Feedback is necessary in order to see what progress you are making toward your goals and objectives. Although self-assessment can be one means of receiving feedback, it is important to involve others in this process as well. Adult basic education teachers have identified receiving feedback in a non-threatening environment as a key element in successful professional development efforts (Lowe 1990a; Smith and Bowes 1986).

Guidelines for Managing Your Professional Development

The following guidelines for managing your professional development are derived from research and practices cited in the literature (Bowes 1984; Jones and Lowe 1985, 1990; Lowe 1990a,b; ***Principles and Techniques for Effective ABE Staff Development*** 1988; Smith and Bowes 1986).

1. Prepare for professional development activities by defining what is to be learned; deciding how to proceed; selecting methods, activities, and resources; securing your supervisor's support; and thinking through logistical considerations such as time, place, and pacing. This advance planning will help ensure success.

2. In developing your plan, begin by writing only one or two sentences about what you hope to accomplish and stating no more than three objectives. You will avoid frustration by not attempting too much at one time.

3. Be aware that such factors as lack of time, resources, or administrative support may deter or hinder your professional development. Acknowledging that such factors exist is the first step in overcoming them.

4. Form a network of individuals who can provide ongoing feedback on the types of changes you are trying to make. The network can include other teachers in your program, your supervisor, and professional colleagues you have met at conferences and staff development activities.

5. Attend a professional conference as a part of your plan for professional development. Conferences are excellent places to meet people who have similar interests and to find out about new resources. Since conference attendance alone is not likely to change your performance, develop follow-up and reinforcing mechanisms such as keeping in touch with the people you meet, acquiring and using the resources, and so forth.

6. Enlist the assistance of colleagues at your work site. They can provide the support, resources, and ongoing feedback required to implement new practices.

7. Make on-site visits to other programs. These visits can enhance your understanding of teaching practices and expand your professional network.

8. Select one of your peers to be your partner in learning a new technique or procedure. Working in pairs provides an opportunity to practice and receive feedback in a nonthreatening environment.

9. Join an adult education professional association. Professional associations provide publications such as newsletters and journals that serve as resources. They also sponsor conferences and workshops that offer opportunities for professional networking. For more information about professional associations in adult education, contact the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, 1112 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Suite 420, Washington, DC 20036.

10. Become familiar with the resources available through the ERIC system. ERIC, the Educational Resources Information Center, is a federally funded information system that collects and disseminates information on all aspects of education. A number of ERIC Clearinghouses provide free or low-cost resources that can be used to support your professional development. For more information on ERIC resources, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090.

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

DIGEST
NO. 122

Reflective Practice in Adult Education

by Susan Imel

1992

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Increasingly, the term *reflective practice* is appearing in the vocabulary of adult education. Based on the notion that skills cannot be acquired in isolation from context, the reflective practice movement has emerged as a reaction to technical and competency based strategies common in the 1970s (Rose 1992). This *ERIC Digest* examines reflective practice in adult education. First, the concept is defined, including its strengths and weaknesses. Then, the relevance of reflective practice to adult education is discussed. Suggested strategies for becoming more reflective in practice conclude the digest.

Reflective Practice Defined and Described

Reflective practice is a mode that integrates or links thought and action with reflection. It involves thinking about and critically analyzing one's actions with the goal of improving one's professional practice. Engaging in reflective practice requires individuals to assume the perspective of an external observer in order to identify the assumptions and feelings underlying their practice and then to speculate about how these assumptions and feelings affect practice (Kottkamp 1990; Osterman 1990; Peters 1991). According to Peters (ibid., p. 95), "[it] is a special kind of practice . . . [that] involves a systematic inquiry into the practice itself."

Educators have become familiar with the concept of reflective practice through Donald Schön's (1983, 1988) writings about reflective practitioners. Schön's work has an historical foundation in a tradition of learning supported by Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget, each of whom advocated that learning is dependent upon the integration of experience with reflection and of theory with practice. Although each argued that experience is the basis for learning, they also maintained that learning cannot take place without reflection. In reflective practice, *reflection* is the essential part of the learning process because it results in making sense of or extracting meaning from the experience (Osterman 1990).

According to Schön (1988), the stage is set for reflection when "knowing-in-action"--the sort of knowledge that professionals come to depend on to perform their work spontaneously--produces an unexpected outcome or surprise. This surprise can lead to one of two kinds of reflection: reflection on action, which occurs either following or by interrupting the activity, or reflection in action, which occurs during (without interrupting) the activity by thinking about how to reshape the activity while it is underway.

Kottkamp (1990) uses the terms "offline" and "online" to distinguish between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-on-action takes place after the activity (i.e., offline), when full attention can be given to analysis without the necessity for immediate action and when there is opportunity for the professional to receive assistance from others in analyzing the event. Reflection-in-action, which occurs during the event, may be more effective in improving practice. It results in online experiments to adjust and improve actions even though it requires simultaneous attention to the behavior and the analysis as if from an external perspective. Schön (1983) states that when reflecting in action, a professional becomes a researcher in the context of practice, freed from established theory and techniques and able to construct a new theory to fit the unique situation.

Before professionals' theories or ideas about practice can be changed, they must be identified. However, in skillful knowing-in-action much of the "skillful action reveals a 'knowing more than we can say,'" a tacit knowledge (Schön 1983, p. 51). In other words, professionals are not able to describe what they do to accomplish an activity. However, Osterman (1990) maintains that an important part of reflective practice is developing the ability to articulate that tacit knowledge in order to share professional skills and enhance the body of professional knowledge.

The values, assumptions, and strategies supporting theories and ideas about practice need to be examined. If this clarification does not occur, professionals may find themselves in the position of espousing one theory but using another in practice, that is, their actions are not consistent with their intent. In reflective practice, professionals can expose their actions to critical assessment to discover the values and assumptions underlying their practice. As professionals become more aware of their theories-in-use, they become more conscious of the contradictions between what they do and what they hope to do (Osterman 1990; Schön 1988).

Reflective practice has both advantages and disadvantages. It can positively affect professional growth and development by leading to greater self-awareness, to the development of new knowledge about professional practice, and to a broader understanding of the problems that confront practitioners (Osterman 1990). However, it is a time-consuming process and it may involve personal risk because the questioning of practice requires that practitioners be open to an examination of beliefs, values, and feelings about which there may be great sensitivity (Peters 1991; Rose 1992).

Engaging in reflective practice requires both knowledge of practice and awareness of professional and personal philosophy. Reflection without an understanding of the rules or techniques that constitute good practice may lead to a repetition of mistakes, whereas reflection without philosophical awareness can lead to a preoccupation with technique (Lasley 1989). Schön (1988) suggests that professionals learn to reflect in action by first learning to recognize and apply standard practice rules and techniques, then to reason from general rules to problematic cases characteristic of the profession, and only then to develop and test new forms of understanding and action when familiar patterns of doing things fail.

The Role of Reflective Practice in Adult Education

In adult education, as in most other professions, there are many prescriptions for effective practice, and professionals are perceived as having specialized expertise that they apply to problems in well-defined practice situations. In reality, however, adult education programs take place in settings that

are characterized by a great deal of ambiguity, complexity, variety, and conflicting values that make unique demands on the adult educator's skills and knowledge. As a result, adult educators are constantly making choices about the nature of practice problems and how to solve them (Cervero 1988, 1989).

Cervero (1988) maintains that the essence of effective practice in adult education is the ability to reflect-in-action. Adult educators must be able to change ill-defined practice situations into those in which they are more certain about the most appropriate course of action to pursue. They must engage in reflective practice and use their "repertoire of past experiences . . . to make sense of the current situation" (p. 157), conducting spontaneous experiments in order to decide on appropriate courses of action.

Reflective practice in adult education can also be a tool for revealing discrepancies between espoused theories (what we say we do) and theories-in-use (what we actually do). For example, the andragogical model and its four underlying assumptions has been widely adopted by adult educators with one result being the assumption that teaching adults should differ from teaching children and adolescents. However, a summary (Imel 1989) of research investigating these differences revealed that although teachers perceive adults as being different, these perceptions do not automatically translate into differences in approaches to teaching.

Strategies for Reflective Practice

Engaging in reflective practice takes time and effort but the rewards can be great. The following list summarizes reflective practice processes (Roth 1989):

- Questioning what, why, and how one does things and asking what, why, and how others do things
- Seeking alternatives
- Keeping an open mind
- Comparing and contrasting
- Seeking the framework, theoretical basis, and/or underlying rationale
- Viewing from various perspectives
- Asking "what if . . .?"
- Asking for others' ideas and viewpoints
- Using prescriptive models only when adapted to the situation
- Considering consequences
- Hypothesizing
- Synthesizing and testing
- Seeking, identifying, and resolving problems

Fortunately, there are a number of resources available for those interested in developing habits of reflective practice. For example, Peters (1991, pp. 91-95) describes a process called DATA that consists of four steps: describe, analyze, theorize, and act. First, the problem, task, or incident representing some critical aspect of practice that the practitioner desires to change is described. For example, a teacher may wish to become less directive and more collaborative in her instructional processes. In the DATA model, she would identify the context in which instruction takes place, how she feels about the directive approach, and reasons for changing it.

Next, through analysis, she would identify factors that contribute to her current directive approach. An important part of this stage is to identify the assumptions that support this approach and bring to light underlying beliefs, rules, and motives governing teaching and learning. Here, the teacher can uncover the theory behind her directive approach.

The third step of the DATA process involves theorizing about alternative ways of approaching teaching by taking the theory derived from the previous step and developing it into a new one. In this step, the teacher is developing an espoused theory to govern her new, collaborative approach.

Finally, she will act and try out her new theory. The goal of this step will be to minimize any discrepancies between the espoused theory and the theory in use, but this will only occur through further thought and reflection.

Additional sources that contain strategies to help adult educators become more reflective in practice are Brookfield's (1988) work on critical thinking and Mezirow's (1990) on fostering critical reflectivity. Although more general, Kottkamp (1990) also contains strategies for "sparking, facilitating, and sustaining reflection at various levels and preparatory stages of professional practice" (p. 182). These resources can help adult educators approach their practice in a reflective manner and deal more effectively with a field characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and variety.

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ERIC DIGEST No. 76

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

STRATEGIES FOR RETAINING ADULT STUDENTS: THE EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED

Retention of adult students is a persistent and perplexing problem for providers of adult education. Participation and nonparticipation are popular subjects in the literature, as researchers attempt to identify characteristics and motivations of adult students and the causes of dropping out. One problem centers around the definition of retention and the value placed on it. Defining retention in terms of program completion is relevant only for some students. For others, retention is successful if students achieve their objectives for participating. Some argue that retention and attrition are neither good nor bad, but that the achievement of the students' goals should be the measure of program success (Holm 1988).

Although retention is a concern in all types of adult programs, this ***ERIC Digest*** focuses on strategies for educationally disadvantaged adults. Updating Fact Sheet No. 12 (Beaudin n.d.), this ***Digest*** looks at causes of nonparticipation, lists general and specific strategies for improving recruitment and retention, and gives examples of successful program models. For more information on adult characteristics, motivations, and barriers to participation, see Brookfield (1986) and Scanlan (1986).

Why Don't They Participate?

The literature on retention of adult learners strongly suggests that previous educational attainment is closely tied to participation and persistence. Educationally disadvantaged adults are more likely to lack self-confidence and self-esteem, have negative attitudes toward education, and need mastery of basic skills such as literacy before attaining job skills that could improve their economic circumstances.

Recent research by Hayes (1988) confirms several propositions about this population: (1) educationally disadvantaged adults typically experience a combination of barriers that cause them to drop out; (2) perception of these barriers varies according to such characteristics as age, sex, and educational level; and (3) even among groups with similar background characteristics, great differences exist in motivation and deterrence factors.

Hayes classified six groups of low-literate adults based on their scores on five deterrence factors: low self-confidence, social disapproval, situational barriers, negative attitude toward education, and low personal priority. Most groups had relatively high scores on more than one factor. This new typology suggests that the most effective recruitment and retention strategy may be to tailor individual programs to the needs of specific groups.

General Retention Strategies

Wlodkowski (1985) provides 68 strategies and examples of learning activities or instructional behavior to carry them out. The following suggestions synthesize the advice of a number of writers and apply to all types of programs.

- Do not seek 100 percent retention. There are different types of attrition; identify which are harmful to the vitality of the program and to student objectives.
- Begin retention efforts with recruitment; devote as much energy to retention as to recruitment.
- Target recruiting at those whom the program is best equipped to serve.
- Emphasize placement, orientation, counseling, and advising early in the program.
- Follow up inactive students with phone calls; have an ongoing process for identifying and tracking these students.

Specific Strategies for Specific Needs

Strategies in this section are grouped by deterrence factors.

Low Self-Confidence

- Make special efforts in the first few weeks to orient students and get them to feel their goals are reachable—first by helping them have realistic goals and expectations.
- Provide comprehensive orientation that includes assessment of ability, self-esteem, learning style, motivations, and values.
- Offer support services such as peer counseling and mentoring.

Social Disapproval

- Emphasize the social aspects (making new friends, warm, friendly atmosphere, informal settings).
- Involve community organizations. Advertise in laundromats, churches, area stores. Use word-of-mouth and door-to-door recruiting, with information coming from *trusted* sources. Distribute program information as inserts in store purchases, paychecks, or telephone bills or flyers sent home with schoolchildren.
- Increase the visibility of the program through community service projects.
- Provide opportunities for the academic and social integration of students.

Situational Barriers

- Offer programs in accessible neighborhood locations with flexible scheduling to fit adult life-styles.
- Arrange transportation (e.g., car pools) and child care.

Negative Attitudes

Advertise success stories and use successful students to recruit and to follow up on dropouts.

- Emphasize the difference between adult basic education and regular school.

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Low Personal Priority

- Focus on employment and employability skills, job survival vocabulary and reading related to daily work situations
- Emphasize daily living/family life skills as a means of improving family relationships
- Give value for money in terms of education, services and facilities

Successful Programs

The Jefferson County Adult Reading Program in Louisville, Kentucky, a National Dissemination Network validated program, has had a 79 percent retention rate using its four-phase model: (1) recruitment, (2) staff training, (3) instructional design, and (4) evaluation (Darling, Puckett, and Paull 1983). Recruitment involves volunteers, the support of community organizations, and use of electronic media such as public service announcements on local radio and television. (Radio campaigns have had 48 percent effectiveness.) Staff are trained using a slide-tape emphasizing psychology of adult learners, counseling techniques, group dynamics, and peer motivation. Instructional materials are individualized, and weekly and midyear project reviews provide feedback for modifying the program.

To increase student retention in adult basic education (ABE) in Arizona, the ***Express Press***, a microcomputer-produced newspaper written by students and instructors, is distributed statewide. A "little magazine" that serves as a curriculum supplement, the ***Express Press*** gives students a medium of expression, a sense of identity, and pride in their accomplishments, thus enhancing self-confidence. Contents include health and safety tips, local news, best seller synopses, sports, trivia, puzzles, and government information (Rio Salado Community College 1985).

Kansas City, Missouri's Adult Education Dropout Project involves counselors, principals, home school coordinators, and outside agencies in dropout identification and referral, making ABE another link in a cooperative educational chain. To alleviate situational barriers and overcome negative attitudes toward previous schooling, telephone calls to prospective students emphasize setting one's own schedule, classes in the neighborhood, individualized instruction, and General Educational Development (GED) Test preparation. During the first year, 75 percent of students referred to the program enrolled in ABE classes (Martin 1987).

Greenville Technical College (South Carolina) makes its community a learning center by bringing basic skills instruction to such sites as hospitals, correctional facilities, community centers, churches, and businesses through a mobile classroom. The program attempts to create a social environment in which education is perceived as important and barriers to participation are reduced. Program features include flexible time units, two vans as student management and curriculum facilities, teams of instructors and volunteers using audiovisual equipment, basic skills linked to a particular degree or diploma program, individualized, mastery-oriented instruction, cost based on contact hours, student learning contracts, and positive reinforcement, including local business incentives for employee participation (Baker 1983).

Conclusion

A common thread in much of the literature discussed here is the instructor as a key factor in retention. Not only the instructor, but all staff should be committed to and involved in recruitment and retention: administrators who set clear program goals and objectives, provide staff development, and include staff and students in decision making; support staff who are friendly, helpful, knowledgeable, and respectful of adult students; and teachers who tailor instruction to student needs, set the climate for learning, listen, allow open discussion, and learn not to take attrition personally.

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ERIC DIGEST No. 82

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Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

TEACHING ADULTS: IS IT DIFFERENT?

The adult education literature generally supports the idea that teaching adults should be approached in a different way than teaching children and adolescents, groups sometimes referred to as preadults. The assumption that teachers of adults should use a style of teaching different from that used with preadults is based on "informed professional opinion; philosophical assumptions associated with humanistic psychology and progressive education; and a growing body of research and theory on adult learning, development, and socialization" (Beder and Darkenwald 1982, p. 143). Following a discussion of the major model underlying this assumption, this **ERIC Digest** examines research that investigates differences in these teaching styles and suggests considerations for practice.

The Andragogical Model

Malcolm Knowles (1980, 1984) is attributed with developing the most cogent model underlying the assumption that teaching adults should differ from teaching children and adolescents (Beder and Darkenwald 1982). By contrasting "andragogical" or learner-centered methods with "pedagogical" or teacher-centered methods, Knowles argues that adults differ from preadults in a number of important ways that affect learning and, consequently, how they approach learning. Therefore, according to Knowles, the more traditional pedagogical model is inappropriate for use with adults.

The following assumptions underlie Knowles' (1984) andragogical model:

- Adults tend to be self-directing.
- Adults have a rich reservoir of experience that can serve as a resource for learning.
- Since adults' readiness to learn is frequently affected by their need to know or do something, they tend to have a life-, task-, or problem-centered orientation to learning as contrasted to a subject-matter orientation.
- Adults are generally motivated to learn due to internal or intrinsic factors as opposed to external or extrinsic forces.

Although the assumptions underlying the andragogical model have to do with how adults learn, the model has clear implications for teaching practice: if adult learning differs from preadult learning, then it follows that adults should be taught differently (Beder and Darkenwald 1982; Feuer and Geber 1988).

Since he first proposed the model, Knowles has gradually modified his position regarding the contrast between how preadults learn (pedagogy) and how adults learn (andragogy). According to Feuer and Geber (1988), "[w]hat he once envisioned as unique characteristics of adult learners, he now sees as innate tendencies of all human beings, tendencies that emerge as people mature" (p. 33). Nevertheless, the andragogical model has strongly influenced the adult education field, with one result being the assumption teaching adults should differ from teaching children and adolescents.

What the Research Says

Although the andragogical approach to teaching adults has been widely espoused by adult educators, until recently there has been no effort to test whether teachers do actually use a different style when teaching adults. Two studies (Beder and Darkenwald 1982; Gorham 1984, 1985) examined this area by investigating the following questions: Do teachers teach adults in a different way, and if so, what are these differences? In both studies, subjects were teachers who taught both adults and preadults. In the Beder and Darkenwald study, information was collected solely through a self-report questionnaire. Gorham used an adaptation of Beder and Darkenwald's questionnaire for the initial phase of her study, followed up with classroom observations of a small number of her sample for a second phase.

In order for the instruction of adults to differ from the instruction of preadults, teachers have to perceive that there are differences in how adults learn. Both studies investigated perceptions of these learning differences and found that teachers believed adults to be significantly more intellectually curious, motivated to learn, willing to take responsibility for their learning, willing to work hard at learning, clear about what they want to learn, and concerned with the practical applications and implications of learning than were children and adolescents.

In both studies, as a result of these perceived differences in how adults and preadults learn, respondents reported significant differences in teaching styles. As compared to teaching children and adolescents, when teaching adults, they spend less time on discipline and giving directions, provide less emotional support to students, structure instructional activities less tightly, and vary their teaching techniques more. Beder and Darkenwald also found significant differences in adult classes in greater use of group discussion, more adjustment in instructional content in response to student feedback, and a greater relationship of class material to student life experiences.

The self-reported differences in teaching behavior were not verified through Gorham's (1984, 1985) follow-up classroom observations. Although she found that with preadults, teachers tended to provide more emotional support and overtly to be more directive, overall, the use of directive teacher behavior was essentially the same with both preadults and adults. In interviews, teachers "spoke

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often of the responsiveness of adult students and of the quality of discussion in adult classes . . . [but] these differences . . . did not appear to influence teachers to adopt the less directive, more student-centered approaches to teaching adults they had reported" (1985, p. 205).

The only exception to the lack of congruence between self-reported and observed behavior was in the classrooms of teachers who changed their classroom environments when teaching adults. Gorham (1984) observed that a nontraditional, less-formal room arrangement (e.g., chairs in a circle) that put the teacher in closer proximity to the students led to a "clear use of the more student-centered approach prescribed for teaching adults" (p. 79). Furthermore, Gorham noted that in her study only female teachers made such adjustments.

Additional findings related to Gorham's analysis of the classroom observations are as follows:

- Teachers with more formal training in adult education tend to use student-centered approaches the least.
- Differences among teachers, in both adult and preadult classes, are more pronounced than differences between the adult and preadult classes.
- Teachers who are the most flexible and responsive in both adult and preadult classes are in the following groups: less-experienced teachers, female teachers, teachers who taught personal enrichment adult classes, secondary teachers, or teachers reporting high teaching differences between how they taught adults and preadults.

Considerations for Practice

Is teaching adults different? Based on the literature discussed here, the answer is both yes and no. Although teachers perceive adults as being different, these perceptions do not automatically translate into differences in approaches to teaching.

Perhaps a better way to frame the question is to ask "Should teaching adults be different?" According to Darkenwald and Beder (1982), "the real issue is not whether learner-centered methods are universally applied by teachers of adults, but rather for what purposes and under what conditions such methods, and others are most appropriate and effective and in fact used by teachers" (p. 153). Gorham (1985), in citing studies that identified interaction patterns of "master" preadult teachers as being less directive and more student-centered than those of "average" preadult teachers, suggests that "the most cogent prescription might be to define responsive teaching techniques as the approved practice for educators at all levels . . ." (p. 207).

Based on these observations, some considerations for practice emerge.

1. **Determine the purpose of the teaching-learning situation.** The andragogical or learner-centered approach is not appropriate in all adult education settings (Feuer and Geber 1988). The decision about which approach to use is contextual and is based upon such things as the goals of the learners, the material to be covered, and so forth.
2. **Provide opportunities for teachers to practice learner-centered methods.** Gorham (1984) suggests training teachers in techniques especially suitable for adult students, such as small-group discussion methods, effective use of nontraditional room arrangements, and so forth.
3. **Select teachers on the basis of their potential to provide learner-centered instructional settings.** Gorham's (1984, 1985) study identified some characteristics of teachers who seemed to be more flexible and responsive in adult settings. However, she also suggests that more research is needed.

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Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

TEACHING ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Adult educators concur that youngsters with learning disabilities (LD) do not simply outgrow them. They become **adults** with LD, and many of them participate in adult education programs. This ERIC Digest discusses the number of adult learners with LD, identifies relevant issues, describes intervention strategies, and suggests specific techniques that adult educators can use with their LD students.

Incidence

The number of adults with LD in adult education is not easy to estimate because extrapolating from the number of school children receiving LD services (4.84 percent in 1987-88) may result in a fair estimate of learning disabled adults in the population but not of those in adult education.

Adults with LD may comprise as many as 80 percent of the students in adult basic education programs (Ross 1987), but a smaller percentage of students in other adult education settings, such as corporate training programs and continuing education, are estimated to have LD (Ross-Gordon 1989).

Teachers may observe the following characteristics in adult learners who have LD (HEATH Resource Center 1989):

- Pronounced difficulty with reading, writing, spelling, and number concepts, although other skills are average to superior
- Poorly formed handwriting that may be printing instead of script and that may have uneven spacing between words
- Difficulty in listening to a lecture and taking notes at the same time
- Severe difficulty in sticking to simple schedules, repeatedly forgetting things and losing things
- Confusion about up and down and right and left
- Excessive anxiety, anger, or depression because of frustration when coping with social situations
- Misinterpretation of the subtleties in language, tone of voice, or social situations

Nonetheless, Ross-Gordon (1989) points out that many adults with LD exhibit strengths that enable them to compensate for their disabilities and to perform successfully even without supportive services.

Issues

Among the most serious issues concerning adults with LD are the lack of an agreed-upon definition of LD and the scarcity of competent assessment tools to identify adults who have them.

Definition

Since the term learning disability was first used in 1963 (Ross 1987), most definitions of LD have been developed to describe children in academic contexts, rather than to describe adults in a variety of work and personal life settings. That is true even of the definition of learning disability most often cited, which was accepted for the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Ross-Gordon 1989).

A definition that does stress the lifelong impact of LD and its potential effects on multiple aspects of a person's life was approved by the Association for Children and Adults with LD in 1986. It defines specific LD as a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin, which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and nonverbal abilities.

Specific LD, the definition says, exists as a distinct handicapping condition and varies in its manifestations and in degrees of severity. The definition states that the condition can affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization, and daily living activities ("ACLD Description" 1986).

As that definition reflects, the theories of LD that have prevailed assume that individuals with LD have difficulty learning because of some difference in information processing (Ross-Gordon 1989). That difference is assumed to have a neurological basis. Recent brain research has substantiated the neuropsychological theory of LD, even though the neurological basis of individual LDs cannot be verified by current assessment procedures (ibid.).

Assessment

When thinking about the assessment of adults with LD, Ross-Gordon (1989) suggests, adult educators should be aware of the scarcity of diagnostic tools appropriate for adults, the importance of enlisting the adults' assistance in the assessment process, and the fact that assessment is useful only to the extent that it helps adults live more fully.

She recommends that testing be used only as part (and perhaps not the most important part) of a comprehensive assessment process. The assessment process is more beneficial when the adult contributes information about personal goals and learning strengths and weaknesses. Not only is the information itself important, but shifting the process from testing to discovery and problem solving increases the adult's involvement and can decrease the negative aspects of testing (Ross-Gordon 1989).

Using assessment instruments to find out whether an adult student has LD has limited value if the information gleaned cannot be acted upon by, for instance, arranging instruction to help the student learn or making him or her eligible for resources or services. That is, the advantages of having

identified an LD student must be weighed against the negative effects of testing and labeling. Ross (1987) encourages adult educators to ask themselves how they can use more sophisticated educational practice to meet the needs of learners without assigning labels.

Intervention Strategies

Ross-Gordon (1989) categorizes intervention strategies for adults with LD according to their goals:

- Basic skills remediation, the model often used in adult basic education
- Subject-area tutoring, such as preparation for the General Educational Development Test
- Compensatory modification that involves changing the environment or the conditions under which learning takes place or helping the adult develop alternative means of accomplishing a goal
- Cognitive or learning strategies training (learning to learn)
- Instruction in survival skills
- Vocational exploration and training

Because no single approach has been demonstrated as ideal, designers of programs often combine two or more approaches (Ross 1987). Teachers can make the most of a student's own pattern of learning strengths and weaknesses by combining skill building, compensatory techniques, and learning strategies.

Teaching Techniques

As with intervention strategies, no single set of teaching techniques is likely to meet the needs of all adults with LD. The following techniques have been suggested (Clearinghouse on Adult Education and Literacy 1989; Ross 1987, 1988; Ross-Gordon 1989).

Learning Style

- Assess individuals' learning styles and teach to the stronger modality or style
- Use multisensory techniques when teaching groups
- Create opportunities for concrete and experiential learning as well as for abstract and reflective learning
- Make abstract concepts more concrete by having students handle materials, relating new information to everyday life, and demonstrating tasks
- Teach new concepts concretely because it is often easier for LD students to learn the theory after learning its practical applications

Student Motivation

- Talk to students about what techniques work best
- Use language experience approaches and materials from their home and work environments
- Build on students' strengths
- Give frequent, positive, and explicit feedback
- Help students recognize success

Learning Strategies

- Teach transferable strategies such as listening, paraphrasing, SQ3R (survey, question, read, recite, review), error monitoring, note-taking methods, sentence combining, and paragraph organizing
- Teach memory techniques such as chunking and mnemonics
- Discuss the situations in which the strategies will be useful and discuss which strategies will be useful across situations

Compensation

- Teach techniques such as tape recording and word processing, use computer-assisted instruction, and develop aids students can carry with them (such as a list of number words they will need to write checks)
- Encourage students to obtain note-takers, readers, tutors, and recorded texts

Organization

- Help students identify organizational patterns
- Make clear transitions from one topic or task to another
- Use color coding whenever possible
- Break lessons into manageable parts
- Help students set realistic goals
- Make directions specific, concrete, and understandable
- Make changes in the schedule, assignments, or examinations orally and in writing
- As a check for accuracy, have the student repeat verbally what has been taught

REFERENCES

This ERIC Digest is based on the following publication:

Ross-Gordon, Jovita M. ***Adults with Learning Disabilities: An Overview for the Adult Educator***. Information Series no. 337. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University, 1989. (ERIC No. ED 315 664).

Additional References

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Sample in-service programs
Full day (6-7 hours)

Agenda 1

Morning activities:	**Minutes**
Coffee and doughnuts with introductions	30
"Worth a thousand words" workshop activity	120
Video: Adventures of a radical hillbilly: An interview with Myles Horton	30
Afternoon activities:	
"TALK about adult learners" workshop activity	90-120
"Straight talk" workshop activity	30

Agenda 2

Morning activities:	
Coffee and doughnuts	15
"Nothing personal, but..." workshop activity (includes introductions)	90-120
Video: A chance to learn or	60
Helping adults learn: Who are your students? (discussion)	30
Afternoon activities:	
"Teachers make it work" workshop activity	180

Agenda 3

Morning activities:	
Coffee and doughnuts with introductions	30
"When I teach I..." workshop activity	120
Videos: Offer 3 instructional strategies (GED Essay, Math, Reading)	60
Afternoon activities:	
"Drawing conclusions about teaching adults" workshop activity	60
"Thumbs up, thumbs down" workshop activity	120-150

Agenda 4

Morning activities:	
Coffee and doughnuts with introductions	30
"Words of wisdom" workshop activity	120-150
Afternoon activities:	
Video: At a loss for words	60
"Speak out on learning" workshop activity	120-150

Half-day (3-4 hours)

Agenda 1

Coffee and doughnuts	15
"Nothing personal, but..." workshop activity (includes introductions)	90-120
Video: Helping adults learn: Who are your students? (discussion)	60

Agenda 2

Coffee and doughnuts with introductions	30
"Speak out on learning" workshop activity	120-150

Agenda 3

Coffee and doughnuts with introductions	30
"Thumbs up, thumbs down" workshop activity	120-150
Video: A chance to learn	60

Agenda 4

Coffee and doughnuts with introductions	30
"Words of wisdom" workshop activity	120
Videos: Offer 3 instructional strategies (GED Essay, Math, Reading)	60

Many of the TALKit workshop activities use content or ideas from the literature on adult learning. My thanks to the following for planting the seeds which developed into these workshop activities.

"Drawing" conclusions about teaching adults:	Jerold Apps Mastering the teaching of adults
Nothing personal, but...	Patricia Cross Adults as learners
Speak out on learning	Jerold Apps Mastering the teaching of adults
Straight talk	Muir and Wischropp Training manual for ABE teachers
TALK about adult learners	Malcolm Knowles The Modern practice of adult education
Teachers make it work	Conti and Fellenz "Implementing adult learning principles" Adult Literacy and Basic Education
Thumbs up, thumbs down	Cooper Faculty development program on teaching adults
When I teach I....	Jerold Apps Mastering the teaching of adults
Words of wisdom	No literature source
Worth a thousand words	Bronx Education Services

TALKit
Teacher journal

reflections on
learning and teaching...

Why we do what we do

Our working philosophy of adult education

Whether they recognize it or not, all practitioners have a philosophy of adult education. And this philosophy influences how they "do" adult education. If asked, practitioners can easily talk about their beliefs about the purpose of adult education and the roles of the learner and the instructor.

These joint responses then are their philosophies: beliefs an individual acquires with regard to the role of adult education, the learner and the learning process, and the teacher and the teaching process. As educators begin to ask questions about how these beliefs affect their practice in the classroom, they begin to develop a "working philosophy."

Why is this development important? First, people already have a philosophy, but this philosophy may not fit the learners, the situation, or an organizational reality. Second, a philosophy may need to be updated according to new experiences or understanding. Third, the old "teach as you've been taught" adage comes in. Without reflection, persons may be teaching or conducting other activities just as they were taught. Fourth, educators are constantly seeing new ideas emerge about practice. On what basis do adult educators accept or reject new ideas and practices?

For you to develop and maintain a working philosophy as an adult educator three actions are vital: becoming aware of your philosophy, engaging in an ongoing evaluation of that philosophy, and reflecting on how that philosophy is carried out in your practice. Here are suggestions for the development of a personal working philosophy.

•Examine what you do and why to increase awareness of your personal philosophy.

•Spend some time in honest self-reflection. What are the strengths and weaknesses of that philosophy?

•Look at the philosophies of others. Compare your philosophy to philosophies held by others in the field. Think about the philosophy being expressed in books and articles about adult education. Talk to other adult educators about their beliefs.

•Consider the strengths of your beliefs. Are you firmly committed to each part of your philosophy? Because of your own reflection or from talking to others and attending workshops are you beginning to question some aspects of your philosophy? Are you actively testing your beliefs to see if these beliefs really result in good practice?

•Consider the organizational setting in which you are working. How does the organizational philosophy affect the extent to which you can act?

•Write your ideas down. This will clarify and focus your thoughts.

The beliefs embodied in a working philosophy should be congruent with practice. Practitioners should be prepared to regularly examine their beliefs and how these beliefs influence their practice. By doing so they will better understand their role as adult educators, the teaching process, and the learner and the learning process.

Adapted from
Why We Do What We Do: Our working philosophy of adult education
by Daniele Flannery and Robert Wielock
Adult Learning/June 1991
Flannery is an assistant professor of adult education at Penn State University.
Wielock is the education and training manager at Bloomsburg University in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania.

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"90% of success is showing up!"
Woody Allen

"Our students should be learning to read the world
instead of just reading the word."
Paulo Freire

"Be wary of people who sit you in circles
but think in lines and people who sit you in lines
and think in circles!"
Myles Horton

"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be,
and help them to become what they
are capable of being."
Goethe

"I look at adults with two eyes. One sees what they are now; one what they might become."
Myles Horton

"Making a living and having a life
are not the same thing."
Paulo Freire